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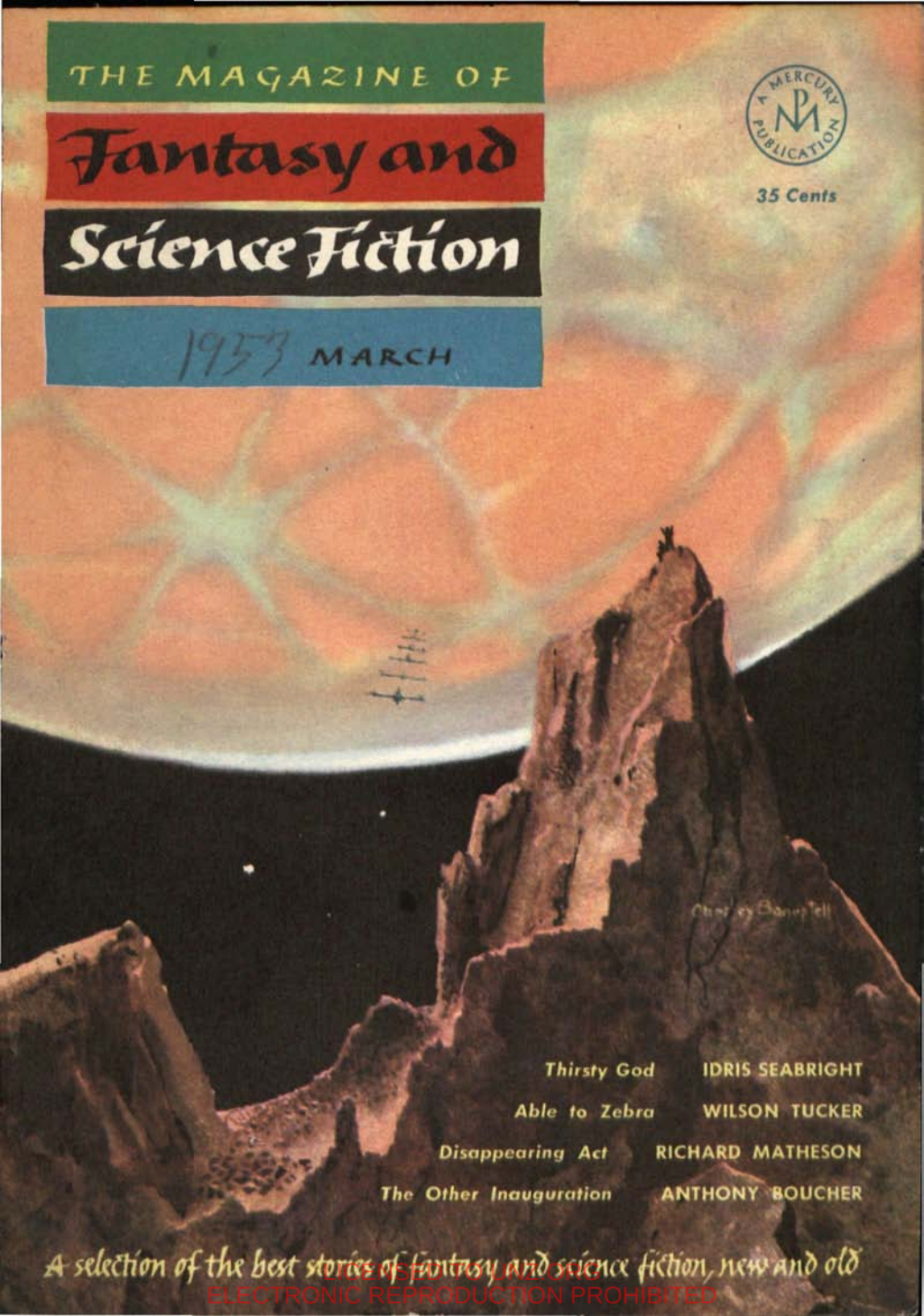

Thirsty God — IDRIS SEABRIGHT
Able to Zebra — WILSON TUCKER
Disappearing Act — RICHARD MATHESON
The Other Inauguration — ANTHONY BOUCHER

A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 4, No. 3 MARCH

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Cover by Chesley Bonestell
(The fleet leaves Mars' inner satellite to land on the planet)

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SOMETHING NEW FOR

No feature of F&SF has proved more consistently attractive to readers than the magnificent astronomical cover-paintings by Chesley Bonestell. "But," you keep writing to us (and very sensibly), "these pictures are too beautiful to be defaced by the title of the magazine and the list of contents; we want the pictures alone, as separate works of art for framing." So this month we're trying an experiment: the fine Bonestell painting of a fleet leaving a Martian satellite for Mars which graces our front cover also appears on the back cover all by itself, giving you (as closely as the best reproduction processes can) the picture exactly as Bonestell painted it. We hope you'll let us know your reaction to this innovation; if you like it, of course we'll keep it up.

COMING . . . IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Cat, by R. Bretnor, a profound scientific study in feline linguistics handled with the high farcical absurdity which only Bretnor can attain;

Beggars All, by J. T. M'Intosh, a striking picture of a culture that could develop from pioneers' hardships, highlighted by a unique battle in space;

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On April 30, 1789, in the city of New York, George Washington was inaugurated as the first President of the United States, and the best working democracy the world has yet known began to function. Since then, dates, places and circumstances of the inauguration of a President-elect have altered: after several changes, its date was fixed by Constitutional amendment as January 20; beginning with Jefferson's taking office in 1800, all our Presidents have been inaugurated in our capital, Washington, D. C.; the inaugural address of Calvin Coolidge was the first to be broadcast on a nationwide hook-up; and, in January, 1953, any American citizen who could get near a TV set was able to see *his President take the oath of office. But despite all these refinements, underneath all its pomp and ceremony, a Presidential inauguration has one simple meaning for the citizen: it is, after all, the end product of a chain of effort that began with the activity of free Americans working and voting within their own neighborhoods. Anthony Boucher knows from precinct-worker experience the practical meaning of democracy* — local *democracy — in action. Thinking about this year's inauguration he began to speculate about a problem that our Constitution has not provided for: should chronokinesis be allowed to affect the voter's choice?*

The Other Inauguration

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

From the journal of Peter Lanroyd, Ph. D.:

Mon Nov 5 84: To any man even remotely interested in politics, let alone one as involved as I am, every 1st Tue of every 4th Nov must seem like one of the crucial *if*-points of history. From every American presidential election stem 2 vitally different worlds, not only for U S but for world as a whole.

It's easy enough, esp for a Prof of Polit Hist, to find examples — 1860, 1912, 1932 . . . & equally easy, if you're honest with yourself & forget you're a party politician, to think of times when it didn't matter much of a special damn who won an election. Hayes-Tilden . . . biggest controversy, biggest outrage on voters in U S history . . . yet how much of an *if*-effect?

But this is different. 1984 (damn Mr Orwell's long-dead soul! he jinxed the year!) is *the* key *if*-crux as ever was in U S hist. And on Wed Nov 7

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my classes are going to expect a few illuminating remarks — wh are going to have to come from me, scholar, & forget about the County Central Comm.

So I've recanvassed my precinct (looks pretty good for a Berkeley Hill precinct, too; might come damn close to carrying it), I've done everything I can before the election itself, & I can put in a few minutes trying to be non-party-objective on why this year of race 1984 is so *if*-vital.

Historical b g:

A) U S always goes for 2-party system, whatever the names.

B) The Great Years 1952/76 when we had, almost for 1st time, honest 2-partyism. Gradual development (started 52 by Morse, Byrnes, Shivers, etc) of cleancut parties of "right" & "left" (both, of course, to the right of a European "center" party). Maybe get a class laugh out of how both new parties kept both old names, neither wanting to lose New England Repub votes or Southern Demo, so we got Democratic American Republican Party & Free Democratic Republican Party.

C) 1976/84 God help us growth of 3d party, American. (The bastards! The simple, the perfect name . . . !) Result: Gradual withering away of DAR, bad defeat in 1980 presidential, total collapse in 82 congressional election. Back to 2-party system: Am vs FDR.

So far so good. Nice & historical. But how tell a class, without accusations of partisanship, what an Am victory means? What a destruction, what a (hell! let's use their own word) subversion of everything American. . . .

Or am I being partisan? Can anyone be as evil, as anti-American, as to me the Senator is?

Don't kid yrself Lanroyd. If it's an Am victory, you aren't going to lecture on Wed. You're going to be in mourning for the finest working democracy ever conceived by man. And now you're going to sleep & work like hell tomorrow getting out the vote.

It was Tuesday night. The vote had been gotten out, and very thoroughly indeed, in Lanroyd's precinct, in the whole state of California, and in all 49 other states. The result was in, and the TV commentator, announcing the final electronic recheck of results from 50 state-wide electronic calculators, was being smug and happy about the whole thing. ("Conviction?" thought Lanroyd bitterly. "Or shrewd care in holding a job?")

". . . Yessir," the commentator was repeating gleefully, "it's such a landslide as we've never seen in all American history — and *American* history is what it's going to be from now on. For the Senator, five . . . hundred . . . and . . . eighty . . . nine electoral votes from forty . . . nine states. For the Judge, four electoral votes from one state.

"Way back in 1936, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt" (he pronounced

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the name as a devout Christian might say Judas Iscariot) "carried all but two states, somebody said, 'As Maine goes, so goes Vermont.' Well, folks, I guess from now on we'll have to say — ha! ha! — 'As Maine goes . . . so goes Maine.' And it looks like the FDR party is going the way of the unlamented DAR. From now on, folks, it's Americanism for Americans!

"Now let me just recap those electoral figures for you again. For the Senator on the American ticket, it's five eighty-nine — that's five hundred and eighty-nine — electoral —"

Lanroyd snapped off the set. The automatic brought up the room lighting from viewing to reading level.

He issued a two-syllable instruction which the commentator would have found difficult to carry out. He poured a shot of bourbon and drank it. Then he went to hunt for a razor blade.

As he took it out of the cabinet, he laughed. Ancient Roman could find a good use for this, he thought. Much more comfortable nowadays, too, with thermostats in the bathtub. Drift off under constantly regulated temperature. Play hell with the M.E.'s report, too. Jesus! Is it hitting me so bad I'm thinking stream of consciousness? Get to work, Lanroyd.

One by one he scraped the political stickers off the window. There goes the FDR candidate for State Assembly. There goes the Congressman — twelve-year incumbent. There goes the United States Senator. State Senator not up for reëlection this year, or he'd be gone too. There goes NO ON 13. Of course in a year like this State Proposition # 13 passed too; from now on, as a Professor at a State University, he was forbidden to criticize publicly any incumbent government official, and compelled to submit the reading requirements for his courses to a legislative committee.

There goes the Judge himself . . . not just a sticker but a full luminoportrait. The youngest man ever appointed to the Supreme Court; the author of the great dissenting opinions of the '50s; later a Chief Justice to rank beside Marshall in the vitality of his interpretation of the Constitution; the noblest candidate the Free Democratic Republican Party had ever offered . . .

There goes the last of the stickers. . . .

Hey, Lanroyd, you're right. It's a symbol yet. There goes the last of the political stickers. You'll never stick 'em on your window again. Not if the Senator's boys have anything to say about it.

Lanroyd picked up the remains of the literature he'd distributed in the precincts, dumped it down the incinerator without looking at it, and walked out into the foggy night.

If . . .

All right you're a monomaniac. You're 40 and you've never married

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(and what a sweet damn fool you were to quarrel with Clarice over the candidates in 72) and you think your profession's taught you that politics means everything and so your party loses and it's the end of the world. But God damn it *this* time it *is*. This *is* the key-point.

If . . .

Long had part of the idea; McCarthy had the other part. It took the Senator to combine them. McCarthy got nowhere, dropped out of the DAR reorganization, failed with his third party, because he attacked and destroyed but didn't *give*. He appealed to hate, but not to greed, no what's-in-it-for-me, no porkchops. But add the Long technique, every-man-a-king, fuse 'em together: "wipe out the socialists; I'll give you something better than socialism." That does it, Senator. Coming Next Year: "wipe out the democrats; I'll give you something better than democracy."

IF . . .

What was it Long said? "If totalitarianism comes to America, it'll be labeled *Americanism*." Dead Huey, now I find thy saw of might. . . .

IF

There was a lighted window shining through the fog. That meant Cleve was still up. Probably still working on temporomagnetic field-rotation, which sounded like nonsense but what did you expect from a professor of psionics? Beyond any doubt the most unpredictable department in the University . . . and yet Lanroyd was glad he'd helped round up the majority vote when the Academic Senate established it. No telling what might come of it . . . *if* independent research had any chance of continuing to exist.

The window still carried a sticker for the Judge and a NO ON 13. This was a good house to drop in on. And Lanroyd needed a drink.

Cleve answered the door with a full drink in his hand. "Have this, old boy," he said; "I'll mix myself another. Night for drinking, isn't it?" The opinion had obviously been influencing him for some time; his British accent, usually all but rubbed off by now, had returned full force as it always did after a few drinks.

Lanroyd took the glass gratefully as he went in. "I'll sign that petition," he said. "I need a drink to stay sober; I think I've hit a lowpoint where I can't get drunk."

"It'll be interesting," his host observed, "to see if you're right. Glad you dropped in. I needed drinking company."

"Look, Stu," Lanroyd objected. "If it wasn't for the stickers on your window, I'd swear you were on your way to a happy drunk. What's to celebrate for God's sake?"

"Well as to God, old boy, I mean anything that's to celebrate is to cele-

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brate for God's sake, isn't it? After all . . . Pardon. I *must* be a bit tiddly already."

"I know," Lanroyd grinned. "You don't usually shove your Church of England theology at me. Sober, you know I'm hopeless."

"Point not conceded. But God does come into this, of course. My rector's been arguing with me — doesn't approve at all. Tampering with Divine providence. But A: how can mere me tamper with anything Divine? And B: if it's possible, it's part of the Divine plan itself. And C: I've defied the dear old boy to establish that it involves in any way the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, or the Thirty-Nine Articles."

"Professor Cleve," said Lanroyd, "would you mind telling me what the hell you are talking about?"

"Time travel, of course. What else have I been working on for the past eight months?"

Lanroyd smiled. "OK. Every man to his obsession. My world's shattered and yours is rosy. Carry on, Stu. Tell me about it and brighten my life."

"I say, Peter, don't misunderstand me. I am . . . well, really dreadfully distressed about . . ." He looked from the TV set to the window stickers. "But it's hard to think about anything else when . . ."

"Go on." Lanroyd drank with tolerant amusement. "I'll believe anything of the Department of Psionics, ever since I learned not to shoot craps with you. I suppose you've invented a time machine?"

"Well, old boy, I think I have. It's a question of . . ."

Lanroyd understood perhaps a tenth of the happy monolog that followed. As an historical scholar, he seized on a few names and dates. Principle of temporomagnetic fields known since discovery by Arthur McCann circa 1941. Neglected for lack of adequate power source. Mei-Figner's experiment with nuclear pile 1959. Nobody knows what became of M-F. Embarrassing discovery that power source remained chronostationary; poor M-F stranded somewhen with no return power. Hasselfarb Equations 1972 established that any adequate external power source must possess too much temporal inertia to move with traveler.

"Don't you see, Peter?" Cleve gleamed. "That's where everyone's misunderstood Hasselfarb. 'Any *external* power source . . .' Of course it baffled the physicists."

"I can well believe it," Lanroyd quoted. "Perpetual motion, or squaring the circle, would baffle the physicists. They're infants, the physicists."

Cleve hesitated, then beamed. "Robert Barr," he identified. "His Sherlock Holmes parody. Happy idea for a time traveler: Visit the Reichenbach Falls in 1891 and see if Holmes really was killed. I've always thought an impostor 'returned.'"

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"Back to your subject, psionicist . . . which is a hell of a word for a drinking man. Here, I'll fill both glasses and you tell me why what baffles the physicists fails to baffle the ps . . ."

" 'Sounds of strong men struggling with a word,' " Cleve murmured. They were both fond of quotation; but it took Lanroyd a moment to place this muzzily as Belloc. "Because the power source doesn't have to be *external*. We've been developing the *internal* sources. How can I regularly beat you at craps?"

"Psychokinesis," Lanroyd said, and just made it.

"Exactly. But nobody ever thought of trying the effect of PK power on temporomagnetic fields before. And it works and the Hasselfarb Equations don't apply!"

"You've done it?"

"Little trips. Nothing spectacular. Tiny experiments. *But* — and this, old boy, is the damnedest part — there's every indication that PK can *rotate* the temporomagnetic stasis!"

"That's nice," said Lanroyd vaguely.

"No, of course. You don't understand. My fault. Sorry, Peter. What I mean is this: We can not only travel in time; we can rotate into another, an alternate time. A world of If."

Lanroyd started to drink, then abruptly choked. Gulping and gasping, he eyed in turn the TV set, the window stickers and Cleve. "*If* . . ." he said.

Cleve's eyes made the same route, then focused on Lanroyd. "What we are looking at each other with," he said softly, "is a wild surmise."

From the journal of Peter Lanroyd, Ph. D.:

Mon Nov 12 84: So I have the worst hangover in Alameda County, & we lost to UCLA Sat by 3 field goals, & the American Party takes over next Jan; but it's still a wonderful world.

Or rather it's a wonderful universe, continuum, whatsit, that includes both this world & the possibility of shifting to a brighter alternate.

I got through the week somehow after Black Tue. I even made reasonable-sounding non-subversive noises in front of my classes. Then all weekend, except for watching the game (in the quaint expectation that Cal's sure victory wd lift our spirits), Stu Cleve & I worked.

I never thought I'd be a willing lab assistant to a psionicist. But we want to keep this idea secret. God knows what a good Am Party boy on the faculty (Daniels, for inst) wd think of people who prefer an alternate victory. So I'm Cleve's factotum & busbar-boy & I don't understand a damned thing I'm doing but —

It works.

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The movement in time anyway. Chronokinesis, Cleve calls it, or CK for short. CK . . . PK . . . sound like a bunch of executives initialing each other. Cleve's achieved short CK. Hasn't dared try rotation yet. Or taking me with him. But he's sweating on my "psionic potential." Maybe with some results: I lost only 2 bucks in a 2 hour crap game last night. And got so gleeful about my ps pot that I got me this hangover.

Anyway, I know what I'm doing. I'm resigning fr the County Committee at tomorrow's meeting. No point futzing around w politics any more. Opposition Party has as much chance under the Senator as it did in pre-war Russia. And I've got something else to focus on.

I spent all my non-working time in politics because (no matter what my analyst might say if I had one) I wanted, in the phrase that's true the way only corn can be, I wanted to make a better world. All right; now I can really do it, in a way I never dreamed of.

CK . . . PK . . . *OK!*

Tue Dec 11: Almost a month since I wrote a word here. Too damned magnificently full a month to try to synopsize here. Anyway it's all down in Cleve's records. Main point is development of my psionic potential. (Cleve says anybody can do it, with enough belief & drive — wh is why Psionics Dept & Psych Dept aren't speaking. Psych claims PK, if it exists wh they aren't too eager to grant even now, is a mutant trait. OK so maybe I'm a mutant. Still . . .

Today I made my first CK. Chronokinesis to you, old boy. Time travel to you, you dope. All right, so it was only 10 min. So nothing happened, not even an eentsy-weentsy paradox. But I did it; & when we go, Cleve & I can go together.

So damned excited I forgot to close parenth above. Fine state of affairs. So:)

Sun Dec 30: Used to really keep me a journal. Full of fascinating facts & political gossip. Now nothing but highpoints, apptly. OK: latest highpoint:

Sufficient PK power *can* rotate the field.

Cleve never succeeded by himself. Now I'm good enough to work with him. And together . . .

He picked a simple one. Purely at random, when he thought we were ready. We'd knocked off work & had some scrambled eggs. 1 egg was a little bad, & the whole mess was awful. Obviously some alternate in wh egg was *not* bad. So we went back (CK) to 1 p m just before Cleve bought eggs, & we (how the hell to put it?) we . . . *worked*. Damnedest sensation. Turns you inside out & then outside in again. If that makes sense.

We bought the eggs, spent the same aft working as before, knocked off work, had some scrambled eggs . . . delicious!

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Most significant damned egg-breaking since Columbus!

Sun Jan 20 85: This is the day.

Inauguration Day. Funny to have it on a Sun. Hasn't been since 57. Cleve asked me what's the inaugural augury. Told him the odds were even. Monroe's 2d Inaug was a Sun . . . & so was Zachary Taylor's 1st & only, wh landed us w Fillmore.

We've been ready for a week. Waited till today just to hear the Senator get himself inaugurated. 1st beginning of the world we'll never know.

TV's on. There the smug bastard is. Pride & ruin of 200,000,000 people.

"Americans!"

Get that. Not "fellow Americans . . ."

"Americans! You have called me in clarion tones & I shall answer!"

Here it comes, all of it. ". . . my discredited adversaries . . ." ". . . strength, not in union, but in unity . . ." ". . . as you have empowered me to root out these . . ."

The one-party system, the one-system state, the one-man party-system-state . . .

Had enough, Stu? (Hist slogan current ca 48) OK: let's *work!*

Damn! Look what this pencil did while I was turning inside out & outside in again. (Note: Articles in contact w body move in CK. For reasons of Cleve's notebooks.) Date is now

Tue Nov 6 84: TV's on. Same cheerful commentator:

". . . Yessir, it's 1 of the greatest landslides in American history. 524 electoral votes from 45 states, to 69 electoral votes from 5 states, all Southern, as the experts predicted. I'll repeat: That's 524 electoral votes for the Judge . . ."

We've done it! We're *there.* . . . then . . . whatever the hell the word is. I'm the first politician in history who ever made the people vote right against their own judgment!

Now, in this brighter better world where the basic tenets of American democracy were safe, there was no nonsense about Lanroyd's resigning from politics. There was too much to do. First of all a thorough job of party reorganization before the Inauguration. There were a few, even on the County and State Central Committees of the Free Democratic Republican Party, who had been playing footsie with the Senator's boys. A few well-planned parliamentary maneuvers weeded them out; a new set of by-laws took care of such contingencies in the future; and the Party was solidly unified and ready to back the Judge's administration.

Stuart Cleve went happily back to work. He no longer needed a busbar-boy from the History Department. There was no pressing need for secrecy

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in his work; and he possessed, thanks to physical contact during chronokinesis, his full notebooks on experiments for two and a half months which, in this world, hadn't happened yet — a paradox which was merely amusing and nowise difficult.

By some peculiar whim of alternate universes, Cal even managed to win the UCLA game 33–10.

In accordance with the popular temper displayed in the Presidential election, Proposition 13, with its thorough repression of all free academic thought and action, had been roundly defeated. A short while later, Professor Daniels, who had so actively joined the Regents and the Legislature in backing the measure, resigned from the Psychology Department. Lanroyd had played no small part in the faculty meetings which convinced Daniels that the move was advisable.

At last Sunday, January 20, 1985, arrived (or, for two men in the world, returned) and the TV sets of the nation brought the people the Inaugural Address. Even the radio stations abandoned their usual local broadcasts of music and formed one of their very rare networks to carry this historical highpoint.

The Judge's voice was firm, and his prose as noble as that of his dissenting or his possibly even greater majority opinions. Lanroyd and Cleve listened together, and together thrilled to the quietly forceful determination to wipe out every last vestige of the prejudices, hatreds, fears and suspicions fostered by the so-called American Party.

"A great man once said," the Judge quoted in conclusion, " 'We have nothing to fear but fear itself.' Now that a petty and wilful group of men have failed in their effort to undermine our very Constitution, I say to you: 'We have one thing to destroy. And that is destruction itself!' "

And Lanroyd and Cleve beamed at each other and broached the bourbon.

From the journal of Peter Lanroyd, Ph. D.:

Sun Oct 20 85: Exactly 9 mos. Obstetrical symbolism yet?

Maybe I shd've seen it then, at this other inauguration. Read betw the lines, seen the meaning, the true inevitable meaning. Realized that the Judge was simply saying, in better words (or did they sound better because I thought he was on My Side?), what the Senator said in the inaugural we escaped: "I have a commission to wipe out the opposition."

Maybe I shd've seen it when the Senator was arrested for inciting to riot. Instead I cheered. Served the sonofabitch right. (And it did, too. That's the hell of it. It's all confused. . . .)

He still hasn't been tried. They're holding him until they can nail him for treason. Mere matter of 2 constitutional amendments: Revise Art III Sec 3

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Par 1 so "treason" no longer needs direct-witness proof of an overt act of war against the U S or adhering to their enemies, but can be anything yr Star Chamber wants to call it; revise Art I Sec 9 Par 3 so you can pass an ex post facto law. All very simple; the Judge's arguments sound as good as his dissent in U S v Feinbaum. (I shd've seen, even in the inaug, that he's not the same man in this world — the same mind turned to other ends. My ends? My end . . .) The const ams'll pass all right . . . except maybe in Maine.

I shd've seen it last year when the press began to veer, when the dullest & most honest columnist in the country began to blether about the "measure of toleration" — when the liberal Chronicle & the Hearst Examiner, for the 1st time in S F history, took the same stand on the Supervisors' refusal of the Civic Aud to a pro-Senator rally — when the NYer satirized the ACLU as something damned close to traitors. . . .

I began to see it when the County Central Committee started to raise hell about a review I wrote in the QPH. (God knows how a Committeeman happened to read that learned journal.) Speaking of the great old 2-party era, I praised both the DAR & the FDR as bulwarks of democracy. Very unwise. Seems as a good Party man I shd've restricted my praise to the FDR. Cd've fought it through, of course, stood on my rights — hell, a County Committeeman's an elected representative of the people. But I resigned because . . . well, because that was when I began to see it.

Today was what did it, though. 1st a gentle phone call fr the Provost — in person, no secty — wd I drop by his office tomorrow? Certain questions have arisen as to some of the political opinions I have been expressing in my lectures. . . .

That blonde in the front row with the teeth & the busy notebook & the D's & F's . . .

So Cleve comes by & I think I've got troubles . . . !

He's finally published his 1st paper on the theory of CK & PK-induced alternates. It's been formally denounced as "dangerous" because it implies the existence of better worlds. And guess who denounced it? Prof Daniels of Psych.

Sure, the solid backer of # 13, the strong American Party boy. He's a strong FDR man now. *He* knows. And he's back on the faculty.

Cleve makes it all come out theological somehow. He says that by forcibly setting mankind on the alternate *if*-fork that *we* wanted, we denied man's free will. Impose "democracy" against or without man's choice, & you have totalitarianism. Our only hope is what he calls "abnegation of our own desire" — surrender to, going along with, the will of man. We must CK & PK ourselves back to where we started.

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The hell with the theology; it makes sense politically too. I was wrong. Jesus! I was wrong. Look back at every major election, every major boner the electorate's pulled. So a boner to me is a triumph of reason to you, sir. But let's not argue which dates were the major boners. 1932 or 1952, take your pick.

It's always worked out, hasn't it? Even 1920. It all straightens out, in time. Democracy's the craziest, most erratic system ever devised . . . & the closest to perfection. At least it keeps coming closer. Democratic man makes his mistakes — & he corrects them in time.

Cleve's going back to make his peace with his ideas of God & free will. I'm going back to show I've learned that a politician doesn't clear the hell & gone out of politics because he's lost. Nor does he jump over on the winning side.

He works & sweats as a Loyal Opposition — hell, as an Underground if necessary, if things get as bad as that — but he holds on & works to make men make their own betterment.

Now we're going up to Cleve's, where the field's set up . . . & we're going back to the true world.

Stuart Cleve was weeping, for the first time in his adult life. All the beautifully intricate machinery which created the temporomagnetic field was smashed as thoroughly as a hydrogen atom over Novosibirsk.

"That was Winograd leading them, wasn't it?" Lanroyd's voice came out oddly through split lips and missing teeth.

Cleve nodded.

"Best damn coffin-corner punter I ever saw . . . Wondered why our friend Daniels was taking such an interest in athletes recently."

"Don't oversimplify, old boy. Not all athletes. Recognized a couple of my best honor students. . . ."

"Fine representative group of youth on the march . . . and all wearing great big FDR buttons!"

Cleve picked up a shard of what had once been a chronostatic field generator and fondled it tenderly. "When they smash machines and research projects," he said tonelessly, "the next step is smashing men."

"Did a fair job on us when we tried to stop them. Well . . . These fragments we have shored against our madness. . . . And now, to skip some three and a half centuries of theater for our next quote, it's back to work we go! Hi-Ho! Hi-Ho! Need a busbar-boy, previous experience guaranteed?"

"It took us ten weeks of uninterrupted work," Cleve said hesitantly. "You think those vandals will let us alone that long? But we have to try, I know." He bent over a snarled mess of wiring which Lanroyd knew was

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called a magnetostat and performed some incomprehensibly vital function. "Now this looks almost servicea —" He jerked upright again, shaking his head worriedly.

"Matter?" Lanroyd asked.

"My head. Feels funny. . . . One of our young sportsmen landed a solid kick when I was down."

"Winograd, no doubt. Hasn't missed a boot all season."

Perturbedly Cleve pulled out of his pocket the small dice-case which seemed to be standard equipment for all psionicists. He shook a pair in his fist and rolled them out in a clear space on the rubbage-littered floor.

"*Seven!*" he called.

A six turned up, and then another six.

"Sometimes," Cleve was muttering ten unsuccessful rolls later, "even slight head injuries have wiped out all psionic potential. There's a remote possibility of redevelopment; it *has* happened. . . ."

"And," said Lanroyd, "it takes both of us to generate enough PK to rotate." He picked up the dice. "Might as well check mine." He hesitated, then let them fall. "I don't think I want to know. . . ."

They stared at each other over the ruins of the machinery that would never be rebuilt.

" 'I, a stranger and afraid . . .' " Cleve began to quote.

"In a world," Lanroyd finished, "I damned well made."

Note:

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Robert Sheckley is an amiable, unassuming young man of twenty-four, cheerful about having a lovely wife, a reasonably taciturn year-old son and the confidence of editors who have the wit to buy his excellent stories. When not sailing a battered sloop called the Gryphon *around Long Island Sound he lives a quiet, routine life in a New Jersey suburb. (Only a California editor would shake his head and consider the Sheckleys' yearning for an apartment in Manhattan outrageously non-human.) Still . . . one wonders if this epitome of humdrum normality isn't just a false front, carefully erected to delude both readers and editors alike. It is hard to believe that someone* completely *human could report so concisely, yet so thoroughly, the essentials of an alien race's mores and psychology as Mr. Sheckley does here.*

The Monsters

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

CORDOVIR AND HUM stood on the rocky mountaintop, watching the new thing happen. Both felt rather good about it. It was undoubtedly the newest thing that had happened for some time.

"By the way the sunlight glints from it," Hum said, "I'd say it is made of metal."

"I'll accept that," Cordovir said. "But what holds it up in the air?"

They both stared intently down to the valley where the new thing was happening. A pointed object was hovering over the ground. From one end of it poured a substance resembling fire.

"It's balancing on the fire," Hum said. "That should be apparent even to your old eyes."

Cordovir lifted himself higher on his thick tail, to get a better look. The object settled to the ground and the fire stopped.

"Shall we go down and have a closer look?" Hum asked.

"All right. I think we have time — wait! What day is this?"

Hum calculated silently, then said, "The fifth day of Luggat."

"Damn," Cordovir said. "I have to go home and kill my wife."

"It's a few hours before sunset," Hum said. "I think you have time to do both."

Cordovir wasn't sure. "I'd hate to be late."

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"Well, then. You know how fast I am," Hum said. "If it gets late, I'll hurry back and kill her myself. How about that?"

"That's very decent of you." Cordovir thanked the younger man and together they slithered down the steep mountainside.

In front of the metal object both men halted and stood up on their tails.

"Rather bigger than I thought," Cordovir said, measuring the metal object with his eye. He estimated that it was slightly longer than their village, and almost half as wide. They crawled a circle around it, observing that the metal was tooled, presumably by human tentacles.

In the distance the smaller sun had set.

"I think we had better get back," Cordovir said, noting the cessation of light.

"*I* still have plenty of time." Hum flexed his muscles complacently.

"Yes, but a man likes to kill his own wife."

"As you wish." They started off to the village at a brisk pace.

In his house, Cordovir's wife was finishing supper. She had her back to the door, as etiquette required. Cordovir killed her with a single flying slash of his tail, dragged her body outside, and sat down to eat.

After meal and meditation he went to the Gathering. Hum, with the impatience of youth, was already there, telling of the metal object. He probably bolted his supper, Cordovir thought with mild distaste.

After the youngster had finished, Cordovir gave his own observations. The only thing he added to Hum's account was an idea: that the metal object might contain intelligent beings.

"What makes you think so?" Mishill, another elder, asked.

"The fact that there was fire from the object as it came down," Cordovir said, "joined to the fact that the fire stopped after the object was on the ground. Some being, I contend, was responsible for turning it off."

"Not necessarily," Mishill said. The village men talked about it late into the night. Then they broke up the meeting, buried the various murdered wives, and went to their homes.

Lying in the darkness, Cordovir discovered that he hadn't made up his mind as yet about the new thing. Presuming it contained intelligent beings, would they be moral? Would they have a sense of right and wrong? Cordovir doubted it, and went to sleep.

The next morning every male in the village went to the metal object. This was proper, since the functions of males were to examine new things and to limit the female population. They formed a circle around it, speculating on what might be inside.

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"I believe they will be human beings," Hum's elder brother Esktel said. Cordovir shook his entire body in disagreement.

"Monsters, more likely," he said. "If you take in account —"

"Not necessarily," Esktel said. "Consider the logic of our physical development. A single focusing eye —"

"But in the great Outside," Cordovir said, "there may be many strange races, most of them non-human. In the infinitude —"

"Still," Esktel put in, "the logic of our —"

"As I was saying," Cordovir went on, "the chance is infinitesimal that they would resemble us. Their vehicle, for example. Would we build —"

"But on strictly logical grounds," Esktel said, "you can see —"

That was the third time Cordovir had been interrupted. With a single movement of his tail he smashed Esktel against the metal object. Esktel fell to the ground, dead.

"I have often considered my brother a boor," Hum said. "What were you saying?"

But Cordovir was interrupted again. A piece of metal set in the greater piece of metal squeaked, turned and lifted, and a creature came out.

Cordovir saw at once that he had been right. The thing that crawled out of the hole was twin-tailed. It was covered to its top with something partially metal and partially hide. And its color! Cordovir shuddered.

The thing was the color of wet, flayed flesh.

All the villagers had backed away, waiting to see what the thing would do. At first it didn't do anything. It stood on the metal surface, and a bulbous object that topped its body moved from side to side. But there were no accompanying body movements to give the gesture meaning. Finally, the thing raised both tentacles and made noises.

"Do you think it's trying to communicate?" Mishill asked softly.

Three more creatures appeared in the metal hole, carrying metal sticks in their tentacles. The things made noises at each other.

"They are decidedly not human," Codovir said firmly. "The next question is, are they moral beings?" One of the things crawled down the metal side and stood on the ground. The rest pointed their metal sticks at the ground. It seemed to be some sort of religious ceremony.

"Could anything so hideous be moral?" Cordovir asked, his hide twitching with distaste. Upon closer inspection, the creatures were more horrible than could be dreamed. The bulbous object on their bodies just might be a head, Cordovir decided, even though it was unlike any head he had ever seen. But in the middle of that head! Instead of a smooth, characterful surface was a raised ridge. Two round indentures were on either side of it, and two more knobs on either side of that. And in the lower half of

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the head — if such it was — a pale, reddish slash ran across. Cordovir supposed this might be considered a mouth, with some stretching of the imagination.

Nor was this all, Cordovir observed. The things were so constructed as to show the presence of bone! When they moved their limbs, it wasn't a smooth, flowing gesture, the fluid motion of human beings. Rather, it was the jerky snap of a tree limb.

"God above," Gilrig, an intermediate-age male gasped. "We should kill them and put them out of their misery!" Other men seemed to feel the same way, and the villagers flowed forward.

"Wait!" one of the youngsters shouted. "Let's communicate with them, if such is possible. They might still be moral beings. The Outside is wide, remember, and anything is possible."

Cordovir argued for immediate extermination, but the villagers stopped and discussed it among themselves. Hum, with characteristic bravado, flowed up to the thing on the ground.

"Hello," Hum said.

The thing said something.

"I can't understand it," Hum said, and started to crawl back. The creature waved its jointed tentacles — if they were tentacles — and motioned at one of the suns. He made a sound.

"Yes, it is warm, isn't it?" Hum said cheerfully.

The creature pointed at the ground, and made another sound.

"We haven't had especially good crops this year," Hum said conversationally.

The creature pointed at itself and made a sound.

"I agree," Hum said. "You're as ugly as sin."

Presently the villagers grew hungry and crawled back to the village. Hum stayed and listened to the things making noises at him, and Cordovir waited nervously for Hum.

"You know," Hum said, after he rejoined Cordovir, "I think they want to learn our language. Or want me to learn theirs."

"Don't do it," Cordovir said, glimpsing the misty edge of a great evil.

"I believe I will," Hum murmured. Together they climbed the cliffs back to the village.

That afternoon Cordovir went to the surplus female pen and formally asked a young woman if she would reign in his house for twenty-five days. Naturally, the woman accepted gratefully.

On the way home, Cordovir met Hum, going to the pen.

"Just killed my wife," Hum said, superfluously, since why else would he be going to the surplus female stock?

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"Are you going back to the creatures tomorrow?" Cordovir asked.
"I might," Hum answered, "if nothing new presents itself."
"The thing to find out is if they are moral beings or monsters."
"Right," Hum said, and slithered on.

There was a Gathering that evening, after supper. All the villagers agreed that the things were non-human. Cordovir argued strenuously that their very appearance belied any possibility of humanity. Nothing so hideous could have moral standards, a sense of right and wrong, and above all, a notion of truth.

The young men didn't agree, probably because there had been a dearth of new things recently. They pointed out that the metal object was obviously a product of intelligence. Intelligence axiomatically means standards of differentiation. Differentiation implies right and wrong.

It was a delicious argument. Olgolel contradicted Arast and was killed by him. Mavrt, in an unusual fit of anger for so placid an individual, killed the three Holian brothers and was himself killed by Hum, who was feeling pettish. Even the surplus females could be heard arguing about it, in their pen in a corner of the village.

Weary and happy, the villagers went to sleep.

The next few weeks saw no end of the argument. Life went on much as usual, though. The women went out in the morning, gathered food, prepared it, and laid eggs. The eggs were taken to the surplus females to be hatched. As usual, about eight females were hatched to every male. On the twenty-fifth day of each marriage, or a little earlier, each man killed his woman and took another.

The males went down to the ship to listen to Hum learning the language; then, when that grew boring, they returned to their customary wandering through hills and forests, looking for new things.

The alien monsters stayed close to their ship, coming out only when Hum was there.

Twenty-four days after the arrival of the non-humans, Hum announced that he could communicate with them, after a fashion.

"They say they come from far away," Hum told the village that evening. "They say that they are bisexual, like us, and that they are humans, like us. They say there are reasons for their different appearance, but I couldn't understand that part of it."

"If we accept them as humans," Mishill said, "then everything they say is true."

The rest of the villagers shook in agreement.

"They say that they don't want to disturb our life, but would be very

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interested in observing it. They want to come to the village and look around."

"I see no reason why not," one of the younger men said.

"No!" Cordovir shouted. "You are letting in evil. These monsters are insidious. I believe that they are capable of — telling an untruth!" The other elders agreed, but when pressed, Cordovir had no proof to back up this vicious accusation.

"After all," Sil pointed out, "just because they look like monsters, you can't take it for granted that they think like monsters as well."

"I can," Cordovir said, but he was outvoted.

Hum went on. "They have offered me — or us, I'm not sure which, various metal objects which they say will do various things. I ignored this breach of etiquette, since I considered they didn't know any better."

Cordovir nodded. The youngster was growing up. He was showing, at long last, that he had some manners.

"They want to come to the village tomorrow."

"No!" Cordovir shouted, but the vote was against him.

"Oh, by the way," Hum said, as the meeting was breaking up. "They have several females among them. The ones with the very red mouths are females. It will be interesting to see how the males kill them. Tomorrow is the twenty-fifth day since they came."

The next day the things came to the village, crawling slowly and laboriously over the cliffs. The villagers were able to observe the extreme brittleness of their limbs, the terrible awkwardness of their motions.

"No beauty whatsoever," Cordovir muttered. "And they all look alike."

In the village the things acted without any decency. They crawled into huts and out of huts. They jabbered at the surplus female pen. They picked up eggs and examined them. They peered at the villagers through black things and shiny things.

In midafternoon, Rantan, an elder, decided it was about time he killed his woman. So he pushed the thing who was examining his hut aside and smashed his female to death.

Instantly, two of the things started jabbering at each other, hurrying out of the hut.

One had the red mouth of a female.

"He must have remembered it was time to kill his own woman," Hum observed. The villagers waited, but nothing happened.

"Perhaps," Rantan said, "perhaps he would like someone to kill her for him. It might be the custom of their land."

Without further ado Rantan slashed down the female with his tail.

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The male creature made a terrible noise and pointed a metal stick at Rantan. Rantan collapsed, dead.

"That's odd," Mishill said. "I wonder if that denotes disapproval?"

The things from the metal object — eight of them — were in a tight little circle. One was holding the dead female, and the rest were pointing the metal sticks on all sides. Hum went up and asked them what was wrong.

"I don't understand," Hum said, after he spoke with them. "They used words I haven't learned. But I gather that their emotion is one of reproach."

The monsters were backing away. Another villager, deciding it was about time, killed his wife who was standing in a doorway. The group of monsters stopped and jabbered at each other. Then they motioned to Hum.

Hum's body motion was incredulous after he talked with them.

"If I understood right," Hum said, "They are ordering us not to kill any more of our women!"

"What!" Cordovir and a dozen others shouted.

"I'll ask them again." Hum went back into conference with the monsters who were waving metal sticks in their tentacles.

"That's right," Hum said. Without further preamble he flipped his tail, throwing one of the monsters across the village square. Immediately the others began to point their sticks while retreating rapidly.

After they were gone, the villagers found that seventeen males were dead. Hum, for some reason, had been missed.

"Now will you believe me!" Cordovir shouted. "The creatures told *a deliberate untruth!* They said they wouldn't molest us and then they proceed to kill seventeen of us! Not only an amoral act — but a *concerted death effort!*"

It was almost past human understanding.

"A deliberate untruth!" Cordovir shouted the blasphemy, sick with loathing. Men rarely discussed the possibility of anyone telling an untruth.

The villagers were beside themselves with anger and revulsion, once they realized the full concept of an *untruthful* creature. And, added to that was the monsters' concerted death effort!

It was like the most horrible nightmare come true. Suddenly it became apparent that these creatures didn't kill females. Undoubtedly they allowed them to spawn unhampered. The thought of that was enough to make a strong man retch.

The surplus females broke out of their pens and, joined by the wives, demanded to know what was happening. When they were told, they were twice as indignant as the men, such being the nature of women.

"Kill them!" the surplus females roared. "Don't let them change our ways. Don't let them introduce immorality!"

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"It's true," Hum said sadly. "I should have guessed it."

"They must be killed at once!" a female shouted. Being surplus, she had no name at present, but she made up for that in blazing personality.

"We women desire only to live moral, decent lives, hatching eggs in the pen until our time of marriage comes. And then twenty-five ecstatic days! How could we desire more? These monsters will destroy our way of life. They will make us as terrible as they!"

"Now do you understand?" Cordovir screamed at the men. "I warned you, I presented it to you, and you ignored me! Young men must listen to old men in time of crisis!" In his rage he killed two youngsters with a blow of his tail. The villagers applauded.

"Drive them out," Cordovir shouted. "Before they corrupt us?"

All the females rushed off to kill the monsters.

"They have death-sticks," Hum observed. "Do the females know?"

"I don't believe so," Cordovir said. He was completely calm now. "You'd better go and tell them."

"I'm tired," Hum said sulkily. "I've been translating. Why don't you go?"

"Oh, let's both go," Cordovir said, bored with the youngster's adolescent moodiness. Accompanied by half the villagers they hurried off after the females.

They overtook them on the edge of the cliff that overlooked the object. Hum explained the death-sticks while Cordovir considered the problem.

"Roll stones on them," he told the females. "Perhaps you can break the metal of the object."

The females started rolling stones down the cliffs with great energy. Some bounced off the metal of the object. Immediately, lines of red fire came from the object and females were killed. The ground shook.

"Let's move back," Cordovir said. "The females have it well in hand, and this shaky ground makes me giddy."

Together with the rest of the males they moved to a safe distance and watched the action.

Women were dying right and left, but they were reinforced by women of other villages who had heard of the menace. They were fighting for their homes now, their rights, and they were fiercer than a man could ever be. The object was throwing fire all over the cliff, but the fire helped dislodge more stones which rained down on the thing. Finally, big fires came out of one end of the metal object.

A landslide started, and the object got into the air just in time. It barely missed a mountain; then it climbed steadily, until it was a little black speck against the larger sun. And then it was gone.

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That evening, it was discovered that 53 females had been killed. This was fortunate since it helped keep down the surplus female population. The problem would become even more acute now, since seventeen males were gone in a single lump.

Cordovir was feeling exceedingly proud of himself. His wife had been gloriously killed in the fighting, but he took another at once.

"We had better kill our wives sooner than every twenty-five days for a while," he said at the evening Gathering. "Just until things get back to normal."

The surviving females, back in the pen, heard him and applauded wildly.

"I wonder where the things have gone," Hum said, offering the question to the Gathering.

"Probably away to enslave some defenseless race," Cordovir said.

"Not necessarily," Mishill put in and the evening argument was on.

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Richard Middleton is chiefly remembered today as the creator of possibly the most successful of all humorous ghost stories, The Ghost Ship — *an ironically happy fate for the tormented poet and story-teller who strove so desperately to become a colorful Bohemian while starving as a drab clerk, and who committed suicide at 29 . . . largely because a publisher's check was delayed in the mails. Next to the familiar title story, the most interesting item in his posthumous* THE GHOST SHIP & OTHER STORIES *(London: Unwin, 1912) is this curious short sketch, one of the briefest of all ghost stories and certainly the most logically hard-headed.*

Shepherd's Boy

by RICHARD MIDDLETON

THE PATH climbed up and up and threatened to carry me over the highest point of the downs till it faltered before a sudden outcrop of chalk and swerved round the hill on the level. I was grateful for the respite, for I had been walking all day and my knapsack was growing heavy. Above me in the blue pastures of the skies the cloud-sheep were grazing, with the sun on their snowy backs, and all about me the gray sheep of earth were cropping the wild pansies that grew wherever the chalk had won a covering of soil.

Presently I came upon the shepherd standing erect by the path, a tall, spare man with a face that the sun and the wind had robbed of all expression. The dog at his feet looked more intelligent than he. "You've come up from the valley," he said as I passed; "perhaps you've seen my boy?"

"I'm sorry, I haven't," I said, pausing.

"Sorrow breaks no bones," he muttered, and strode away with the dog at his heels. It seemed to me that the dog was apologetic for his master's rudeness.

I walked on to the little hill-girt village, where I had made up my mind to pass the night. The man at the village shop said he would put me up, so I took off my knapsack and sat down on a sackful of cattle cake while the bacon was cooking.

"If you came over the hill, you'll have met shepherd," said the man, "and he'll have asked you for his boy."

"Yes, but I hadn't seen him."

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The shopman nodded. "There are clever folk who say you can see him, and clever folk who say you can't. The simple ones like you and me, we say nothing, but we don't see him. Shepherd hasn't got no boy."

"What! Is it a joke?"

"Well, of course it may be," said the shopman guardedly, "though I can't say I've heard many people laughing at it yet. You see, shepherd's boy he broke his neck . . .

"That was in the days before they built the fence above the big chalk-pit that you passed on your left coming down. A dangerous place it used to be for the sheep, so shepherd's boy he used to lie along there to stop them dropping into it, while shepherd's dog he stopped them from going too far. And shepherd he used to come down here and have his glass, for he took it then like you or me. He's blue ribbon now.

"It was one night when the mists were out on the hills, and maybe shepherd had had a glass too much, or maybe he got a bit lost in the smoke. But when he went up there to bring them home, he starts driving them into the pit as straight as could be. Shepherd's boy he hollered out and ran to stop them, but four-and-twenty of them went over, and the lad he went with them. You mayn't believe me, but five of them weren't so much as scratched, though it's a sixty foot drop. Likely they fell soft on top of the others. But shepherd's boy he was done.

"Shepherd he's a bit spotty now, and most times he thinks the boy's still with him. And there are clever folk who'll tell you that they've seen the boy helping shepherd's dog with the sheep. That would be a ghost now, I shouldn't wonder. I've never seen it, but then I'm simple, as you might say.

"But I've had two boys myself, and it seems to me that a boy like that, who didn't eat and didn't get into mischief, and did his work, would be the handiest kind of boy to have about the place."

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In the two and a half years since young Dick Matheson published his first story (the by now classic Born of Man and Woman *in F&SF, Summer, 1950), he has appeared in very nearly every science fiction market of any importance, he has been reprinted twice in the Bleiler-Dikty annual* BEST *volumes and by just about every other anthologist in the field, and he has acquired a wife so stunning as to appear outstanding at a science fiction convention also attended by Bea Mahaffey and Evelyn Gold. We publish all of these cheerful Mathesoniana as counterweight to the following story, a bitterly cheerless picture of a completely unsuccessful writer, and the ineluctable force of an ill-advised prayer.*

Disappearing Act

by RICHARD MATHESON

These entries are from a school notebook which was found two weeks ago in a Brooklyn candy store. Next to it on the counter was a half finished cup of coffee. The owner of the store said no one had been there for three hours prior to the time he first noticed the book.

Saturday morning early:

I shouldn't be writing this. What if Mary found it? Then what? The end, that's what, five years out the window.

But I have to put it down. I've been writing too long. There's no peace in me unless I put things on paper. I have to get them out and simplify my mind. But it's so hard to make things simple and so easy to make them complicated.

Thinking back through the months.

Where did it start? An argument of course. There must have been a thousand of them since we married. And always the same one, that's the horror.

Money.

"It's not a question of confidence in your writing," Mary will say. "It's a question of bills and are we or aren't we going to pay them?"

"Bills for what?" I'll say. "For necessities? No. For things we don't even need."

"Don't need!" And off we go. God, how impossible life is without enough

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money. Nothing can overcome it, it's everything when it's anything. How can I write in peace with endless worries of money, money, money? The television set, the refrigerator, the washer — none of them paid for yet. And the bed she wants . . .

But despite all, I — I with wide-eyed idiocy — keep making it even worse.

Why did I have to storm out of the apartment that first time? We'd argued, sure, but we'd argued before. Vanity, that's all. After seven years — *seven!* — of writing I've made only $316 from it. And I'm still working nights at that lousy part-time job typing. And Mary has to keep working at the same place with me. Lord knows she has a perfect right to doubt. A perfect right to keep insisting I take that full-time job Jim keeps offering me on his magazine.

All up to me. An admission of lack, a right move and everything would be solved. No more night work. Mary could stay home the way she wants to, the way she should. A right move that's all.

So I've been making the wrong one. God, it makes me sick.

Me, going out with Mike. Both of us like glassy-eyed imbeciles meeting Jean and Sally. For months now pushing aside the obvious knowledge that we were being fools. Losing ourselves in a new experience. Playing the ass to perfection.

And last night, both of us married men, going with them to their club apartment and . . .

Can't I say it? Am I afraid, too weak? Fool!

Adulterer.

How can things get so mixed up? I love Mary. Very much. And yet, even loving her, I did this thing.

And to make it all even more complicated I enjoyed it. Jean is sweet and understanding, passionate, a sort of symbol of lost things. It was wonderful. I can't say it wasn't.

But how can wrong be wonderful? How can cruelty be exhilarating? It's all perverse, it's all jumbled and confused and enraging.

Saturday afternoon:

She's forgiven me, thank God. I'll never see Jean again. Everything will be all right.

This morning I went and sat on the bed and Mary woke up. She stared up at me, then looked at the clock. She'd been crying.

"Where have you been?" she asked in that thin little girl's voice she gets when she's been scared.

"With Mike," I told her. "We drank and talked all night."

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She stared a second more. Then she took my hand slowly and pressed it against her cheek.

"I'm sorry," she said and tears came to her eyes.

I had to put my head down next to hers so she wouldn't see my face. "Oh Mary," I said, "I'm sorry too."

I'll never tell her. She means too much to me. I *can't* lose her.

Saturday night:

We went down to Mandel's furniture Mart this afternoon and got a new bed.

"We can't afford it, honey," Mary said.

"Never mind," I said. "You know how lumpy the old one is. I want my baby to sleep in style."

She kissed my cheek happily. She bounced on the bed like an excited kid. "Oh, feel how soft!" she said.

Everything is all right. Everything except the new batch of bills in today's mail. Everything except for my latest story which won't get started. Everything except for my novel which has bounced five times. Burney House *has* to take it. They've held it long enough. I'm counting on it. Things are coming to a head with my writing. With everything. More and more I get the feeling that I'm a wound-up spring.

Well, Mary's all right.

Sunday night:

More trouble. Another argument. I don't even know what it was about. She's sulking. I'm burning. I can't write when I'm upset. She knows that.

I feel like calling Jean. At least *she* was interested in my writing. I feel like saying the hell with everything. Getting drunk, jumping off a bridge, something. No wonder babies are happy. Life is simple for them. Some hunger, some cold, a little fear of darkness. That's all. Why bother growing up? Life gets too complicated.

Mary just called me for supper. I don't feel like eating. I don't even feel like staying in the house. Maybe I'll call up Jean later. Just to say hello.

Monday morning:

Damn, damn, damn!

Not only to hold the book for over two months. That's not bad enough, oh no! They have to spill coffee all over the manuscript and send me a *printed* rejection slip to boot. I could kill them! I wonder if they think they know what they're doing.

Mary saw the slip. "Well, what *now*?" she said, disgustedly.

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"Now?" I said. I tried not to explode.

"Still think you can write?" she said.

I exploded. "Oh, they're the last judge and jury aren't they?" I raged. "They're the final word on my writing aren't they?"

"You've been writing seven years," she said. "Nothing's happened."

"And I'll write seven more," I said. "A hundred, a *thousand!*"

"You won't take that job on Jim's magazine?"

"No, I will not."

"You said you would if the book failed."

"I *have* a job," I said. "And you have a job and that's the way it is and that's the way it's going to stay."

"It's not the way *I'm* going to stay!" she snapped.

She may leave me. Who cares? I'm sick of it all anyway. Bills, bills. Writing, writing. Failures, failures, *failures!* And little old life dribbling on, building up its beautiful brain-bursting complexities like an idiot with blocks.

You! Who run the world, who spin the universe. If there's *anybody* listening to me, make the world simpler! I don't believe in anything but I'd give . . . *anything!* if only . . .

Oh what's the use? I don't care anymore.

I'm calling Jean tonight.

Monday afternoon:

I just went down to call up Jean about Saturday night. Mary is going to her sister's house that night. She hasn't mentioned me going with her so I'm certainly not going to mention it.

I called Jean last night but the switchboard operator at the Club Stanley said that she was out. I figured I'd be able to reach her today at her office.

So I went to the corner candy store to look up the number. I probably should have it memorized by now. I've called her enough. But, somehow, I never bothered trying. What the hell, there are always telephone books.

She works for a magazine called *Design Handbook* or *Designer's Handbook* or something like that. Odd, I can't remember that either. Guess I never gave it much thought.

I do remember where the office is though. I called for her there a few months ago and took her to lunch. I think I told Mary I was going to the library that day.

Now, as I recall, the telephone number of Jean's office was in the upper right hand corner of the right page in the directory. I've looked it up dozens of times and that's where it always was.

Today it wasn't.

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I found the word *Design* and different business names starting with that word. But they were in the lower left hand corner of the left page, just the opposite. And I couldn't seem to find any name that clicked. Usually as soon as I see the name of the magazine I think, *there it is.* Then I looked up the number. Today it wasn't like that.

I looked and looked and thumbed around but I couldn't find anything like a *Design Handbook.* Finally I settled for the number of *Design Magazine* but I had the feeling it wasn't the one I was searching for.

I . . . I'll have to finish this later. Mary just called me for lunch, dinner, what have you? The big meal of the day anyway since we both work at night.

Later:

It was a good meal. Mary can certainly cook. If only there weren't those arguments. I wonder if Jean can cook.

At any rate, the meal steadied me a little. I needed it. I was a little nervous about that telephone call.

I dialed the number. A woman answered.

"*Design Magazine,*" she said.

"I'd like to talk to Miss Lane," I told her.

"Who?"

"Miss Lane."

"One moment," she said. And I knew it was the wrong number. Every other time I'd called the woman who answered had said "All right" immediately and connected me with Jean.

"What was that name again?" she asked.

"Miss Lane. If you don't know her, I must have the wrong number."

"You might mean Mr. Payne."

"No, no. Before, the secretary who answered always knew right away who I wanted. I have the wrong number. Excuse me."

I hung up. I was pretty irritated. I've looked that number up so many times it isn't funny.

Now, I can't find it.

Of course I didn't let it get me at first. I thought maybe the phone book in the candy store was an old one. So I went down the street to the drugstore. It had the same book.

Well, I'll just have to call her from work tonight. But I wanted to get her this afternoon so I'd be sure she'd save Saturday night for me.

I just thought of something. That secretary. Her voice. It was the same one who used to answer for *Design Handbook.*

But . . . Oh, I'm dreaming.

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Monday night:

I called the club while Mary was out of the office getting us some coffee.

I told the switchboard operator the same way I've told her dozens of times,

"I'd like to speak to Miss Lane, please."

"Yes sir, one moment," she said.

There was silence a long time. I got impatient. Then the phone clicked again.

"What was that name?" the operator asked.

"Miss Lane, Miss *Lane*," I said. "I've called her any number of times."

"I'll look at the list again," she said.

I waited some more. Then I heard her voice again.

"I'm sorry. No one by that name is listed here."

"But I've called her any number of times there."

"Are you sure you have the right number?"

"Yes, yes I'm sure. This *is* the Club Stanley, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well that's where I'm calling."

"I don't know what to say," she said. "All I can tell you is that I'm certain there isn't anyone by that name living here."

"But I just called *last night!* You said she wasn't in."

"I'm sorry. I don't remember."

"Are you sure? Absolutely sure?"

"Well, if you want, I'll look at the list again. But no one by that name is on it, I'm positive."

"And no one by that name moved out within the last few days?"

"We haven't had a vacancy for a year. Rooms are hard to get in New York, you know."

"I know," I said and hung up.

I went back to my desk. Mary was back from the drugstore. She told me my coffee was getting cold. I said I was calling Jim in regards to that job. That was an ill-chosen lie. Now she'll start in on that again.

I drank my coffee and typed a while. But I didn't know what I was doing. I was trying hard to settle my mind.

She has to be somewhere, I thought. I know I didn't dream all those moments together. I know I didn't imagine all the trouble I had keeping it a secret from Mary. And I know that Mike and Sally didn't . . .

Sally! Sally lived at the Club Stanley too.

I told Mary I had a headache and was going out for an aspirin. She said there must be some in the men's room. I told her they were a kind I didn't like. I get involved in the flimsiest lies!

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I half ran to the nearby drugstore. Naturally I didn't want to use the phone at work again.

The same operator answered my ring.

"Is Miss Sally Norton there?" I asked.

"One moment please," she said and I felt a sinking sensation in my stomach. She always knew the regular members right away. And Sally and Jean had been living there for at least *two years.*

"I'm sorry," she said. "No one by that name is listed here."

I groaned. "Oh my God."

"Is something wrong?" she said.

"No Jean Lane and no Sally Norton live there?"

"Are you the same party who called a little while ago?"

"Yes."

"Now, look. If this is a joke . . ."

"A joke! Last night I called you and you told me Miss Lane was out and would I like to leave a message. I said no. Then I call tonight and you tell me there's nobody there by that name."

"I'm sorry. I don't know what to say. I was on the board last night but I don't recall what you say. If you like I'll connect you with the house manager."

"No, never mind," I said and hung up.

Then I dialed Mike's number. But he wasn't home. His wife Gladys answered, told me Mike had gone bowling.

I was a little nervous or I wouldn't have slipped up.

"With the boys?" I asked her.

She sounded kind of slighted. "Well, I *hope* so," she said.

I'm getting scared.

Tuesday night:

I called Mike again tonight. I asked him about Sally.

"Who?"

"Sally."

"Sally who?" he asked.

"You know damn well Sally who, you hypocrite!"

"What is this, a gag?" he asked.

"Maybe it is," I said. "How about cutting it out?"

"Let's start all over," he said. "Who the hell is Sally?"

"You don't know Sally Norton?"

"No. Who is she?"

"You never went on a date with her and Jean Lane and me?"

"Jean Lane! What are you talking about?"

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"You don't know Jean Lane either?"

"*No, I don't* and this is getting very unfunny. I don't know what you're trying to pull but cut it out. As two married men we . . ."

"Listen!" I almost shouted into the phone. "Where were you three weeks ago Saturday night?"

He was silent a moment.

"Wasn't that the night you and I bached while Mary and Glad went to see the fashion show at . . ."

"Bached! There was no one with us?"

"Who?"

"No girls? Sally? Jean?"

"Oh, here we go again," he groaned. "Look, pal, what's eating you? Anything I can do?"

I slumped against the wall of the telephone booth.

"No," I said weakly. "No."

"Are you sure you're all right? You sound upset as hell."

I hung up. I *am* upset. I have a feeling as though I were starving and there wasn't a scrap of food in the whole world to feed me.

What's wrong?

Wednesday afternoon:

There was only one way to find out if Sally and Jean had really disappeared.

I met Jean through a friend I knew at college. Her home is in Chicago and so is my friend Dave's. He was the one who gave me her New York address, the Club Stanley. Naturally I didn't tell Dave I was married.

So I'd looked up Jean and I went out with her and Mike went out with her friend Sally. That's the way it was. I *know* it happened.

So today I wrote a letter to Dave. I told him what had happened. I begged him to check up at her home and write quickly and tell me it was a joke or some amazing set of coincidences. Then I got out my address book.

Dave's name is gone from the book.

Am I really going crazy? I know perfectly well that the address was in there. I can remember the night, years ago, when I carefully wrote it down because I didn't want to lose contact with him after we graduated from college. I can even remember the ink blot I made when I wrote it because my pen leaked.

The page is blank.

I remember his name, how he looked, how he talked, the things we did, the classes we took together.

I even had a letter of his he sent to me one Easter vacation while I was at school. I remember Mike was over at my room. Since we lived in New York

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there wasn't time to get home because the vacation was only for a few days.

But Dave had gone home to Chicago and, from there, sent us a very funny letter, special delivery. I remember how he sealed it with wax and stamped it with his ring for a gag.

The letter is gone from the drawer where I always kept it.

And I had three pictures of Dave taken on graduation day. Two of them I kept in my picture album. They're still there.

But he's not on them.

They're just pictures of the campus with buildings in the background.

I'm afraid to go on looking. I could write the college or call them and ask if Dave ever went there.

But I'm afraid to try.

Thursday afternoon:

Today I went out to Hempstead to see Jim. I went to his office. He was surprised when I walked in. He wanted to know why I'd traveled so far just to see him.

"Don't tell me you've decided to take that job offer," he said.

I asked him, "Jim, did you ever hear me talking about a girl named Jean in New York?"

"Jean? No, I don't think so."

"Come on, Jim. I did so mention her to you. Don't you remember the last time you and I and Mike played poker? I told you about her then."

"I don't remember, Bob," he said. "What about her?"

"I can't find her. And I can't find the girl Mike went out with. And Mike denies that he ever knew either one of them."

He looked confused so I told him again. Then he said,

"What's this? Two old married men gallivanting around with . . ."

"They were just friends," I cut in, "I met them through a fellow I knew at college. Don't get any bright ideas."

"All right, all right, skip it. Where do I fit in?"

"I can't *find* them. They're gone. I can't even prove they existed."

He shrugged. "So what?" Then he asked me if Mary knew about it. I brushed that off.

"Didn't I mention Jean in any of my letters?" I asked him.

"Couldn't say. I never keep letters."

I left soon after that. He was getting too curious. I can see it now. He tells his wife, his wife tells Mary — fireworks.

When I rode to work late this afternoon I had the most awful feeling that I was something temporary. When I sat down it was like I was resting on air.

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I guess I must be cracking. Because I bumped into an old man deliberately to find out if he saw me or felt me. He snarled and called me a clumsy idiot.

I was grateful for that.

Thursday night:

Tonight at work I called up Mike again to see if he remembered Dave from college.

The phone rang, then it clicked off. The operator cut in and asked, "What number are you calling, Sir?"

A chill covered me. I gave her the number. She told me there wasn't any such number.

The phone fell out of my hand and clattered to the floor. Mary stood up at her desk and looked over. The operator was saying, "Hello, hello, hello . . ." I hurriedly put the phone back in the cradle.

"What happened?" Mary asked when I came back to my desk.

"I dropped the phone," I said.

I sat and worked and shivered with cold.

I'm afraid to tell Mary about Mike and his wife Gladys.

I'm afraid she'll say she never heard of them.

Friday:

Today I checked up on *Design Handbook*. Information told me there was no such publication listed. But I went over to the city anyway. Mary was angry about me going. But I had to go.

I went to the building. I looked at the directory in the lobby. And even though I knew I wouldn't find the magazine listed there, it was still a shock that made me feel sick and hollow.

I was dizzy as I rode up the elevator. I felt as if I were drifting away from everything.

I got off at the third floor at the exact spot where I'd called for Jean that time.

There was a textile company there.

"There never was a magazine here?" I asked the receptionist.

"Not as long as I can remember," she said. "Of course, I've only been here three years."

I went home. I told Mary I was sick and didn't want to go to work tonight. She said all right she wouldn't go either. I went into the bedroom to be alone. I stood in the place where we're going to put the new bed when it's delivered next week.

Mary came in. She stood in the doorway restively.

"Bob, what's the matter?" she asked. "Don't I have a right to know?"

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"Nothing," I told her.

"Oh, please don't tell me that," she said. "I know there is."

I started toward her. Then I turned away.

"I . . . I have to write a letter," I said.

"Who to?"

I flared up. "That's my business," I said. Then I told her to Jim.

She turned away. "I wish I could believe you," she said.

"What does *that* mean?" I asked. She looked at me for a long moment and then turned away again.

"Give *Jim* my best," she said and her voice shook. The way she said it made me shudder.

I sat down and wrote the letter to Jim. I decided he might help. Things were too desperate for secrecy. I told him that Mike was gone. I asked him if he remembered Mike.

Funny. My hand hardly shook at all. Maybe that's the way it is when you're almost gone.

Saturday:

Mary had to work on some special typing today. She left early.

After I had breakfast I got the bank book out of the metal box in our bedroom closet. I was going down to the bank to get the money for the bed.

At the bank I filled out a withdrawal slip for $97. Then I waited in line and finally handed the slip and the book to the teller.

He opened it and looked up with a frown.

"This supposed to be funny?" he asked.

"What do you mean, funny?"

He pushed the book across to me. "Next," he said.

I guess I shouted.

"What's the matter with you!"

Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of the men at the front desks jump up and hurry over. A woman behind me said, "Let me at the window, if you please."

The man came fussing up.

"What seems to be the trouble, sir?" he asked me.

"This teller refuses to honor my bank book," I told him.

He asked for the book and I handed it to him. He opened it. Then he looked up in surprise. He spoke quietly.

"This book is blank," he said.

I grabbed it and stared at it, my heart pounding.

It was completely unused.

"Oh, my God," I moaned.

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"Perhaps we can check on the number of the book," the man said. "Why don't you step over to my desk?"

But there wasn't any number on the book. I saw that. And I felt tears coming into my eyes.

"No," I said. "No." I walked past him and started toward the doorway.

"One moment, sir," he called after me.

I ran out and ran all the way home.

I waited in the front room for Mary to come home. I'm waiting now. I'm looking at the bank book. At the line where we both signed our names. At the spaces where we had made our deposits. Fifty dollars from her parents on our first anniversary. Two hundred and thirty dollars from my veteran's insurance dividend. Twenty dollars. Ten dollars.

All blank.

Everything is going. Jean. Sally. Mike. Names fluttering away and the people with them.

Now this. What's next?

Later:

I know.

Mary hasn't come home.

I called up the office. I heard Sam answer and I asked him if Mary was there. He said I must have the wrong number, no Mary works there. I told him who I was. I asked him if *I* worked there.

"Stop the kidding around," he said. "See you Monday night."

I called up my cousin, my sister, her cousin, her sister, her parents. No answer. Not even a ringing. None of the numbers work.

Then they're all gone.

Sunday:

I don't know what to do. All day I've been sitting in the living room looking out at the street. I've been watching to see if anybody I know comes by the house. But they don't. They're all strangers.

I'm afraid to leave the house. That's all there is left. Our furniture and our clothes.

I mean *my* clothes. Her closet is empty. I looked into it this morning when I woke up and there wasn't a scrap of clothing left. It's like a magic act, everything disappearing, it's like . . .

I just laughed. I must be . . .

I called up the furniture store. It's open on Sunday afternoons. They said they have no record of us buying a bed. Would I like to come in and check?

I hung up and I looked out the window some more.

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I thought of calling up my aunt in Detroit. But I can't remember the number. And it isn't in my address book any more. The entire book is blank. Except for my name on the cover stamped in gold.

My name. Only my name. What can I say? What can I do? Everything is so simple. There's *nothing* I can do.

I've been looking at my photograph album. Almost all the pictures are different. There aren't any people on them.

Mary is gone and all of our friends and our relatives.

It's funny.

In the wedding picture I sit, all by myself, at a huge table covered with food. My left arm is out and bent as though I were embracing my bride. And all along the table are glasses floating in the air.

Toasting me.

Monday morning:

I just got back the letter I sent to Jim. It has NO SUCH ADDRESS stamped on the envelope.

I tried to catch the mailman but I couldn't. He was gone before I woke up.

I went down to the grocer before. He knew me. But when I asked him about Mary he said stop kidding, I'd die a bachelor and we both knew it.

I have only one more idea. It's a risk but I'll have to take it. I'll have to leave the house and go downtown to the Veteran's Administration. I want to see if my records are there. If they are, they'll have something about my schooling and about my marriage and the people that were in my life.

I'm taking this book with me. I don't want to lose it. If I lost it, then I wouldn't have a thing in the world to remind me that I'm not insane.

Monday night:

I'm sitting in the corner candy store.

The house is gone.

When I got back from the V.A. I found an empty lot there. I asked some of the boys playing there if they knew me. They said they didn't. I asked them what happened to the house. They said they'd been playing in that empty lot since they were kids.

The V.A. didn't have any records about me. Not a thing.

That means I'm not even a person now. All I have is all I am, my body and the clothes on it. All the identification papers are gone from my wallet.

My watch is gone too. Just like that. From my wrist.

It had an inscription on the back. I remember it.

To my own darling with all my love. Mary.

I'm having a cup of cof

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Some 90 years ago, when the British magazine Fun *began publishing a series of ballads by a young lawyer who signed himself "Bab," a new kind of witty and imaginative satire entered our literature, a purely logical extrapolation of absurdity which was later, when "Bab" was identified as William Schwenk Gilbert, to give us the adjective Gilbertian. Much of Gilbert's work lies in the fantasy field* (Ruddigore *has one of the cleverest supernatural plot-tricks ever devised); and the most underrated of the Savoy operas,* Utopia, Limited, *might even qualify as a kind of social science fiction in its delightful exploration of a lost-island culture. Gilbert himself, we think, would have enjoyed Ralph Robin's discovery of the planet Leu. He would recognize a kindred mind behind the logical structure of its society, the splendidly conceived office of* politeman, *and the inexorable working out of the hero's destiny.*

Inefficiency Expert

by RALPH ROBIN

"We're sorry about the delay, your honor."

"Sorry! Do you realize what would happen to the officials responsible if this were Tagr? On Tagr the spaceships run on time."

"On Leu nothing runs on time," the politeman said. He didn't sound sad about it.

"Why not?" the exponential executive from Tagr demanded. "It's easy enough. Give a man a job. Give him personnel. If results don't come up to scratch, shoot him. Or if you want to run a liberal society, fire him and let him starve."

"On Leu nobody is shot, nobody is fired, nobody starves."

"What a planet," the executive said. "You — what is it they call you?"

"Vorasel, your honor." The accent was on the last syllable.

"Not your name. Who cares what your name is? I mean your job."

"A politeman, your honor."

"Yes. Imagine paying people to be polite."

"We don't have to pay people to be polite to each other on Leu, your honor. All we Leuans are polite to one another, in an informal kind of way.

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The professional politeman is paid to be polite to visitors. Sometimes it's a little difficult for the ordinary citizen."

The executive from Tagr permitted himself to shake with laughter. "You're a very impolite politeman," he said. He stopped laughing. "If you were on Tagr, I could have your skin removed one square mercury at a time."

"I'm on Leu," the politeman said. "I suppose I'm not very good at my job — nobody on Leu is, of course — but may I remark that you were not invited to this planet?"

"It demeans me to talk to you. But I might point out that a twelfth-power exponential executive doesn't need invitations. Personnel comes and goes as it's told — I come and go as I please."

"Where the spaceships run on time," the politeman said.

"Everywhere," the executive said. "I might also point out that it wasn't any wish to see Leu that made me squeeze into an emergency cylinder. I preferred my own company on a cruiser to the company of a million foreigners — polite or impolite. Accidents happen."

"Among the efficient Tagrans? You will have to shoot your Executive for Transportation."

"I am the Executive for Transportation!"

"I am sorry, your honor. I had forgotten."

"Again I insist on seeing the supreme authorities of Leu. It is absurd that I should be speaking to one of your rank."

"All politemen are of the same rank and nobody except a politeman would talk to you."

"I won't have it!"

"Be patient, your honor. Our best spaceship is being prepared by our best mechanics as fast as they can work, and it was extraordinarily considerate of us to route it to Tagr. Maybe it will be ready today, maybe tomorrow. The work shouldn't take too long," he added; "the foreman is very popular."

"A popular foreman!" The executive closed his fists and made hissing sounds. Then he said quietly, "I deal in realities. There is nothing I can do — I do nothing. The time will come when Leu will give me the attention I deserve."

"That may be," Vorasel said. "I must apologize, your honor, for such of my remarks as have been tactless. I am really worse at my job than the average Leuan. I should be much more polite. In making amends, may I suggest that we visit some of the cultural places to help pass the time?"

"Cultural places!" The executive was fond of repeating words sarcastically. On Tagr it terrorized his subordinates. "Does Leu have a culture?"

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He kicked a piece of broken paving stone. (The play on the word *culture* in the stellar language was somewhat different, but this gives its effect.)

"They didn't do a very good job on this walk," the politeman admitted. "Well, if you don't want some culture today, would you be interested in visiting a training school?"

"A Leuan training school might be worth seeing, in a way," the executive said. He sneered to himself for a moment. "All right. Since I have to wait for your undisciplined workmen to patch together one of your obsolete spaceships — and it's a tribute to my courage that I consent to take passage — I may as well look at this training school of yours."

"I'm sorry my cruiser is out of order, but it's not a long walk."

"Cruiser. What a name for them. Only a Leuan could call one of those things by the same name *we* use for a class-six recreational spaceship. Don't be sorry, politeman — I'd just as soon walk."

"Would you like something else to eat first?"

"I'm not hungry enough!"

The path drifted down a grade between disorderly — but luxuriant — flower gardens. The executive walked a step or two in front, now ignoring the politeman. Once Vorasel had to recall him to turn where two paths met. The executive and the politeman crossed a cruiser track and a parking spur and came at last to the red-brick entrance of a buff building surrounded by trees.

"In here, your honor." Vorasel tugged at the door. When he had got it open, the executive stalked before him into an office or a reception room. A young man with very light hair sat at a table where there were scattered peelings of fruit — the executive looked at them and scowled — and a large grooved board with counters, one of which the young man was moving. Behind the board stood a mounted diaphragm. The young man reached into a paper bag on the floor and pulled out a small black tube. He leaned toward the diaphragm and blew through the tube. It made a shrill whistle, and counters chased each other along the grooves of the board.

"What's this? A warning system on Leu?"

"No, your honor," Vorasel said.

"Well, what is it?"

"Tell him, Whitey," Vorasel said.

The young man looked up for the first time. "I won't talk to a goddamned Tagran executive," he said. (The word *goddamned* has the approximate force of the idiom he used. *Whitey* is another linguistic compromise, by the way. Similar terms will be used without special reference.)

The executive was a man of decision and he had decided on self-control. He contented himself with turning red.

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"I was thinking of the boys, Whitey," Vorasel said. "His honor might be a — a good example for the boys."

"It's an idea at that." The young man stood up. "Hello," he grunted.

"I am Twelfth-Power Dalet-Fraygo-Tapandri-Mil, Executive for Transportation. I am addressed as 'your honor.'"

"Oh, all right, your honor. I'm Toggan. I run this training school, or I am supposed to. I am addressed as Whitey" — he touched his hair — "except by the boys, of course."

"Well, I should hope not, Whitey," the executive said, with good humor. "I'm glad to see that someone on Leu has an elementary sense of discipline."

"Where are the boys, Whitey?" the politeman asked.

"They're in the library doing calisthenics," Whitey said softly.

The executive chuckled. "That's very good, Whitey. I think I'm going to like you. Calisthenics in the library is good. That should teach them the importance of the physical."

"Let's go and take a look at them," Vorasel said.

Whitey led the visitors up a flight of stairs and along a hall. They entered a large, bright room. Tables were pushed against the shelves of books. Some tables were placed upside down on others. Three precise ranks of boys — three to a rank — were threshing their arms in rhythmic unison while a tenth boy croaked at them: "Gub, gub, gub, GUB. Gub, gub, gub, GUB. One, two, three, FOUR."

The croaking boy caught sight of the party at the door and yelled, "Honor Director!" Nine boys moved as one. Each boy seized his right foot with his left hand, spun a half circle on his left foot, slapped his left ear with his right hand, and released his right foot and stamped it on the floor. "Squat!" the boy leader howled. They squatted. The leader leap-frogged three boys. He landed a slight distance in front of Whitey and straightened. Then he touched his toes three times without bending his knees and stood at attention.

The executive looked delighted; Whitey looked sick; and the politeman looked polite.

"Wonderful, my boy, wonderful," said Dalet-Fraygo-Tapandri-Mil. "I've never seen anything finer — even in the Exponentially Executive Cadet Corps of Tagr." He turned quickly to Whitey. "Excuse me, director, for speaking out of channels, but these boys are magnificent."

"Thank you, your honor," Whitey said. His voice was too polite.

"So long as you're doing my job for me, Whitey," the politeman said, "I think I'll go away for a while. If you start getting impolite to his honor, radiophone me. Goodbye, your honor; have a good time. I'll see you here later. I'll make it a point to check on the spaceship."

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He left quickly.

"May we return to our calisthenics, sir?" the boy leader asked.

"Suit yourselves," Whitey grumbled.

The boy honored him with a slap on his own ear and spun about. He set the other boys to moving hands and feet in a complicated pattern. "Gub, gub, gub, GUB . . ."

"What I don't understand, Whitey," the executive said, raising his voice above the gubbing and stamping, "is how after such excellent training you Leuans turn out to be so damned inefficient and slovenly."

Whitey's voice was loud, also, and no longer polite. "That's the reaction I'd expect from a filthy Tagran executive. Why, you long-named fool, these youngsters are delinquents that I'm supposed to be reforming. I suggest a walk in the woods, and they go all together and march in step. I suggest sports, and they organize teams. I ask them to call me Whitey, and they call me 'director' and 'sir.' I ask them to go to the library, and they do calisthenics. I want them to become free spirits of men, incarnated — and they subordinate themselves to anybody with a loud voice." Whitey was in a rage. "Listen, boys," he bellowed. "Stop those halfwitted gyrations right now and put the tables back and read some books."

"We obey, sir," the boy leader said. "You heard the Director, you little scum. Jump!" The nine boys busily arranged the tables in neat lines while the boy leader watched, his arms folded.

"Can't you do it without having Storrin tell you?" Whitey asked plaintively.

"Sir —" one of the boys started.

"Call me Whitey."

"Whitey, we boys believe that always there must be one to give orders."

"Why?" Whitey asked.

"To develop discipline."

"But what good is discipline?"

"Discipline gets a job done."

"By creating ten more that didn't need to be done," Whitey said.

"But, sir — Whitey, jobs that don't need to be done are the best for developing discipline."

"These are lads after my own heart," exclaimed Dalet-Fraygo-Tapandri-Mil.

"You can have them," Whitey said, "and they can have you."

He turned away from the Tagran and from his charges and walked out of the room. In the hall he hesitated, turned again, and poked his head in the door. The boys were obediently reading books; their faces were dully resigned. "I ordered your spirits to be free," he said sadly. "Don't read

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books if you don't want to. Don't do anything you don't want to. Do anything you want to."

Walking down the stairs slowly, he heard, "Gub, gub, gub, GUB," and the stamp of feet.

Whitey tried to radiophone Vorasel, but Vorasel's radiophone wasn't working. He sat down at his table. He pulled a whistle from the paper bag and blew at the diaphragm. Counters chased each other along the grooves of the board. He put out his hand to make the next move, then stopped. He noticed that he was still holding the whistle, and he threw it across the room. "Counters," he said. "Counters that move only when pushed or whistled at. Or when pushing and whistling. It comes to the same thing. Poor devils." He got up and paced the floor. "I wish I were better at my job," he said.

When Vorasel returned, he found Whitey sitting at the table with his elbow on a piece of rind and his head in his hands. "Where's old Twelfth-Power?" the politeman asked.

Whitey raised his head. "In the library with the boys, I guess. Probably gub-gub-gubbing with the rest of them. I couldn't be polite to him any more. I tried to call you, but your radiophone was out of order. I don't suppose," he said miserably, "that I should have left him up there with the boys. Your idea that he'd be some kind of a lesson is pretty weak, when I think it over. Bad examples are bad pedagogy."

"You don't want to be a good pedagogue, do you?" Vorasel asked cheerfully. Then he said, "Excuse me. I see you do."

"It's a serious thing. Not only for the youngsters themselves but also for Leu."

"Also for Whitey," Vorasel said.

"True enough. I'd like to get back to teaching normal children and feeling again that I'm doing something worth while. It bothers me to sit here helplessly and watch them grow into mature monstrosities. Imagine those ten turned loose in our society." He shivered slightly. "Do you know that they have a saying among themselves: 'If you want to command, you must first learn to obey'?"

Vorasel winced. "What sensible person would want to do either?"

"Those youngsters aren't sensible people. Is your long-named executive a sensible person?"

"He's sensible on Tagr. But I don't see why you blame yourself so much. After all, execution's illegal; confinement's illegal; deportation is illegal —"

"What things even to mention!"

"— psychosurgery is illegal; hypnosis is illegal; and semihypnotic prying is unethical, to say the least."

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Whitey blushed. "I did have a semihypnotic practitioner in — a good one, too. But he couldn't begin to get their real cooperation. All they would do was answer his questions with mechanical obedience." Whitey smiled slightly. "He came to the conclusion that their trouble was constitutional. Anyway, I was going further than I should have gone in calling him in. What good is a free spirit if it is not freely developed? But, on the other hand, if, given real freedom, these boys freely choose not to be free, are they freer than if they are compelled by one means or another to be free? I see that my metaphysics is boring you."

"You've scored a point," Vorasel said

Whitey took his chromium register from his pocket and clicked it once, scoring the point officially. "That reminds me," he said. "Have I told you that the Committee is upset about the situation?"

The politeman shook his head negatively.

"Well, it is. Three members have called on me already."

The politeman shook his head sympathetically.

Whitey stared at his hands. "I think you had better get that executive out of here," he said.

Vorasel started upstairs. Soon he heard: ". . . a job. Give him personnel. If results don't come up to scratch, shoot him. Or if you want to run a liberal society, fire him and let him starve. But shooting is neater, and both in large things and small, neatness contributes to efficiency. In the Exponentially Executive Cadet Corps we emphasize the inculcation of habits of neatness. You boys have done wonders in spite of your unfavorable environment — I like especially the salute you have devised — but I urge you to work on neatness. Divide yourselves according to age or other criteria into inspectors and inspectees. The inspectees will be responsible to the inspectors for keeping themselves, their quarters, and their equipment immaculate. If the inspectors find any deviation from perfection, they will humiliate the inspectees by public insults and will physically torture them in various ways suggested by the inspectors' ingenuity and capacity for leadership. This system is known on Tagr as character-building —"

"If you will excuse me, your honor . . ."

"Oh, it's you. That's one thing you'll have to get rid of, boys — *politemen*. Well, what do you want, politeman? Spaceship ready?"

"If your honor will come out in the hall . . ."

"Why not? Take over, Storrin."

The boy leader slapped himself on the left ear respectfully. "Yes, sir," he said.

In the hall, Dalet-Fraygo-Tapandri-Mil demanded, "Well, what is it?"

"I don't know how to tell your honor this . . . The spaceship is ready . . ."

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"That was easy to say. I'll leave at once."

"Now I want your honor to take a firm grip on your temper."

"What are you trying to say? Spit it out, you fool."

"On the one hand the members don't want you here," Vorasel mumbled. "On the other hand they don't want Tagr to learn too much about Leu. . . ."

"Members? What members? Spit it out!"

"The Committee of Bores has decided that you can't leave," Vorasel said.

"The committee of bores. Has decided. That I can't leave. Oh, they have, have they?" Dalet grabbed the politeman by the throat and began to strangle him. "Who's the committee of bores?" he asked, strangling him.

The politeman politely pointed to his throat, but Dalet pressed harder. "I'll kill you," Dalet said, and sneezed. Again and again he sneezed, doubling his body and waving his arms.

"Sneezing powder," the politeman apologized. "I'm immunized, of course. Here, you poor chap — I mean, your honor — this will help." He sprayed some aerosol, and the executive's spasm eased. "In answer to your question, your honor, the Committee of Bores is the closest thing to a government that we have on Leu. Everybody keeps count of the number of times he bores somebody, and every year the hundred and one citizens who are the worst current bores must serve on the Committee."

The executive gained command of himself. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Vorasel, your honor," the politeman answered patiently.

"Look here, Vorasel. I want you to know that I'm not being taken in. I don't for a minute believe that Leu is governed by a committee of bores. I have never heard of any society governed by bores. There is more to all this than —"

"— than meets the eye," Vorasel murmured.

"How did you know what I was going to say? It's obvious that you Leuans are feckless, inefficient, insolent, and undisciplined, but somewhere there must be a core of — if not real administrators — at least manipulators. My judgment, Vorasel, is that you are one of them." The executive wiped his nose. "I could do many things for you on Tagr," he said.

"Such as having my skin removed one square mercury at a time?"

"I was joking. The apparatus is not adjustable to so small a unit, and anyway we don't flay anyone on Tagr now except a few nonconformists. Sometimes I think it's a shame that our two peoples don't get to know each other better. After all we're the same species circling the same star, and just because our planetary cultures diverged a few centuries ago there's no reason why we can't make you comfortable on Tagr. Very comfortable, Vorasel."

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"Exactly what are you offering me for passage to Tagr, your honor?"

The executive looked at him suspiciously. He wiped his nose again. Then he said, "You Leuans can't even do a good job of taking a bribe. I'm not offering anything. Let's visit one of those cultural places of yours."

"Fine, your honor. I suggest the Hall of Sculpture, if it is agreeable."

"It will do, politeman. I've always felt that sculpture was less foolish than the other arts. There's an excellent statue of me on top of the Transportation Building. It has me holding a wheel in one hand and a molecule in the other hand and it's ingeniously designed to serve as part of the ventilating system."

They went down to Whitey's office. Whitey was standing at a window and staring out, as he gloomily gnawed a large pink fruit. The executive picked up one of the counters from the board on the table. "You were going to tell me how this thing works, Whitey," he said.

Whitey didn't answer or turn around.

"It's a game," the politeman said. "People play it to quiet their nerves. Each whistle has a different pitch. When the player picks out a whistle at random and blows it near the diaphragm, the counters on the board move according to the pitch and also the volume and the previous positions on the board. Then the player moves a piece. The object is to get the pieces into a predetermined pattern. It's partly skill, but more luck."

Dalet-Fraygo-Tapandri-Mil seemed bored, and Vorasel took out his register to score a point against himself. But he looked sharply at the executive and put the register back in his pocket without using it. "You were right," he said. "There are no warning systems on Leu."

Dalet shrugged.

"I borrowed a cruiser, your honor. We won't have to walk."

Dalet shrugged again, but he looked pleased.

The cruiser was on the parking spur, backed against Whitey's. Sneering only mildly, Dalet climbed in. Vorasel eased the cruiser onto the main track and they rattled away. "I hope you don't mind that we have to pass the Landing," the politeman yelled. "I hope it won't make you unhappy to see the ship."

"That won't make me unhappy. I've told you my philosophy. There is nothing I can do — I do nothing. Anyhow, I think I need a rest. Perhaps in a month or two that committee will get bored with me." And all he said when they passed the Landing was, "What are you going to do with the ship now?"

"They will probably send it off somewhere. Probably tomorrow. But not to Tagr."

"Where is this Hall of Sculpture?"

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"Just a little distance from here, your honor," the politeman yelled.

In the Hall of Sculpture, the executive commented politely on the works of art. He was polite even in front of the group in high relief called *Death of the Last Executive.* This showed a tottering figure, felled by his inner sickness as he uttered his last hopeless shriek of command. Around the central figure, men and women and children were portrayed smiling to one another: all save one little girl smiled. The little girl had been the first to react to the last executive's fall; on her face was a look of surprise and profound pity.

"It's very nice technically, I'm sure," the living executive said. Vorasel led him to that simple, lovely, white statue, *Woman Bathing.* "In a public place!" Dalet exclaimed. "But it's very nice, making allowances."

They went on. Dalet's feet got tired, and he sat down in a comfortable chair. "If you don't mind, your honor," the politeman said, "I'll leave you for a while. I have one or two things to attend to."

"As you wish, my boy," the executive said. "The peace of Leu is beginning to sink into my soul."

Vorasel rattled in the cruiser to the old stone house where the Chairwoman of the Committee lived. She was alone, and she was delighted to see Vorasel. "Sit down! Sit down! Tell me everything that's happening. I want to know how it's working out. You don't know how anxious I've been waiting for you to come and tell me. It reminds me of the time . . ." She described at length how she had waited for something 30 years before.

Vorasel's eyes became glassy, and the good old bore noticed at last. She clicked her register, which was on the table beside her. "At this rate," she said unhappily, "I'll be on the damned Committee for the rest of my life. Well, what did he do, Vorasel?"

"He made speeches to Whitey's boys. He tried to strangle me when I told him he couldn't leave. Then he got philosophical. We looked at sculpture. The peace of Leu is sinking into his soul."

"What's real and what's fake?"

"I'm not sure. He may not be as simple as he seems. He may have decided to dig in, using the boys as a spade."

"I hope not. Maybe we should have told him to board the ship."

"Don't think so hard. It will give you wrinkles."

The old woman laughed. "You don't have to be that polite to me, politeman. Where on my face is there not a wrinkle? But you go ahead and do the thinking from now on, Vorasel."

"Who's been doing the thinking up to now?" he asked, smiling gently.

"I wouldn't boast about it, my friend. If things go wrong, the Committee will bore you in relays for days on end."

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"On Tagr they only shoot you," Vorasel said. "Goodbye."

"Seventy years ago," the Chairwoman said, "I knew a young man like you. I knew him very well, I might say. I was then living with my sister — not the botanist — I mean the one who was interested in the theory of unsystematic eating . . ." She scored several more points against herself before Vorasel was able to break away.

It was getting dark. Vorasel climbed into the cruiser and went to pick up the acrobats he needed. He dropped them at the Landing and returned to the Hall of Sculpture, where he had left the executive alone.

Vorasel spun the switch that was just inside the entrance. Lights went on slowly, section by section, bringing in view the familiar rilievo and statuary: to his left as they curved out of sight and to his right as they curved into sight, in the leaf-shaped building.

He strolled past *Death of the Last Executive* and *Many Dichotomies* and *Woman Bathing*. Dalet wasn't in the comfortable chair. A boy and a girl were sitting in it. Vorasel asked them if they had seen a foreigner.

"There was one leaving as we came in," the boy said. "He asked us some questions, but of course I didn't answer."

"He wanted to know where the police were," the girl said. "I answered the poor man even if he was a foreigner. I told him that he wanted the History Show."

"I'm not sure that was what he wanted, my dear," Vorasel said. "Thank you, both. I'm sorry I turned the lights on."

"Oh, that's all right," the boy said. "Don't you think my girl beats *Woman Bathing*?"

"I do indeed," Vorasel said politely.

Vorasel turned out the lights and went away. It occurred to him that a young woman might be helpful. He sat in the cruiser, eating thoughtfully. He considered several possibilities. Smiling, he decided on Janlai, and he cruised to her little house, which he had helped her to build. He had laid most of the bricks while Janlai had mixed the mortar. It was a sturdy house, though the courses of brick were somewhat crooked.

He found Janlai accepting eggs from her waddling housebird and drinking them from their shells with spices.

"Have some, Vorasel?"

"No, thanks. I ate some curds a little while ago. Would you like to come for a ride with me?"

"With no one more." She swallowed another egg and took his hand.

They rode to the training school, and Vorasel let the cruiser roll onto the parking spur, stopping it just before it hit Whitey's cruiser.

"What are we doing here?" Janlai asked. "Visiting Whitey?"

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"Not exactly. We are preventing a public calamity."

"How exciting."

"I'm not joking."

Vorasel led her, not to the door, but to the window of Whitey's office. They saw the teacher sprawled asleep over his whistle-board. "Dalet-Fraygo-Tapandri-Mil could have walked right by him," Vorasel said, shaking his head reproachfully.

"Who's that mouthful?"

"A twelfth-power exponential sonofabitch from Tagr." Vorasel looked along the side of the building. There was light from one of the rooms on the second story, and it wasn't like the delinquents to leave lights on in an empty room or to sit in the dark. "Are you good at climbing trees quietly?" Vorasel asked.

The young woman laughed.

"S-s-sh," Vorasel warned.

"But you say such unexpected things. You'll never be on the Committee. As a matter of fact, I'm an unusually quiet climber of trees."

"Well, come along. See that window up there? Climb this tree very quietly and come down and tell me what's going on inside."

Vorasel helped her up, and she leaend forward with her bare arm around the trunk. In a moment, she scrambled down. "I saw a pompous man in there making a speech to the boys."

Vorasel kissed Janlai's round arm.

"Come along," he said. He ran to the front of the building and burst into the office. "Wake up! Dalet and the rest of his name is here conspiring with your boys. I think he's up to something dangerous. Hurry!"

Stopping only to pick up a whistle, Vorasel ran recklessly up the stairs dragging Janlai by the hand. Whitey followed in a kind of dazed rush, unable to say a word.

Janlai could say words. "What is this, Vorasel? What's going on? If this is serious, I think you should call out the citizens. Surround this Dalet with a lot of men."

"I'm proud of you, Janlai. Thoughtful girl." They were at the top of the stairs. The conspirators were in the room next to the library; the door was closed. "Whitey, block the back stairs! I'll head them off if they come this way."

"Yes, yes, of course," Whitey said. He pushed his hand through his hair once and ran down the hall.

"A'hoo!" Vorasel shouted, "a'hee! GUB! That ought to do it," he said to Janlai conversationally.

It did do it.

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Dalet pounded into the hall, followed by the boys. They raced for the stairs.

"Your honor," Vorasel said, "I insist —"

"Any interference from you and my boys will tear you apart. Follow me!"

"I obey," Storrin, the boy leader, screamed. "Follow me!"

The pack ran down the steps. Vorasel caught the last boy by his clothes. But the boy wriggled free and ran after the others.

"Whitey! Whitey!" Vorasel shouted. "They got away. Quick. After them."

"There are no back stairs," Whitey said." . . . I knew that. . . ." He sounded puzzled.

"We have to pull ourselves together here," Vorasel said.

Blowing the whistle, Vorasel led *his* army — Whitey and Janlai — down the stairs and outside. The executive was borrowing Vorasel's borrowed cruiser, and the boys were piling in. The last boy was yanked in by his mates, and Dalet sent the cruiser rolling on the main track. It picked up speed.

"We'll take your cruiser," Vorasel said to Whitey, "and head them off."

Vorasel leaped to the controls. The others got in. They rattled down the track. Vorasel blew his whistle.

Janlai was yelling indignantly, "Vorasel, for heaven's sake, stop that noise. You're downright hysterical. You're the one who needs to pull himself together. How can we head them off when we're on the same track?"

"She's right," Whitey said. "And what are we heading them off from?"

"From the Landing of course. But I meant, catch them," Vorasel said, trying to make the cruiser go faster.

"Why don't you radiophone someone to stop the power and call out the citizens?" Janlai asked.

"My radiophone's out of order."

"Mine isn't — I don't think it is —"

"No, Janlai!" Vorasel cried. "I am responsible for this catastrophe and I will quell them singlehanded."

"You can count on me, friend," Whitey said. "It was more my fault than yours."

"Janlai," Vorasel said, "if we should die by violence — the first to die so in 400 years — remember that I loved you and that Whitey was my friend."

"I will never forget," Janlai cried. And while Vorasel courteously stopped to allow a man to drive from his spur to the main track, they kissed.

"They'll get away," Whitey said.

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"Yes, there's someone in front of us," Vorasel said. "We'll never catch them this way."

Whitey was clearheaded now. "Let's get out of this cruiser," he said. "We'll take a short cut."

He led Vorasel and Janlai behind houses and through a small park. Across a cruiser track was the Landing. Dalet and the delinquents were running toward the ship.

"Maybe the guards will get them," Vorasel said.

"What are *guards?*" Janlai panted. She used the word Vorasel had used, an obsolete word on Leu.

"Guards are people paid to get in somebody's way," Vorasel said.

There was clear ground between Dalet and the ship. But some of the boys were slowing down, were looking over their shoulders.

"Stop!" Whitey called. "Think what you are doing!"

Vorasel blew the whistle, and three guards came on the run from behind the ship.

"Rush them!" the executive roared.

The guards braced themselves.

"I order you to stop!" Whitey called. He made an odd groaning noise. "A choice between two obediences," he said, to Vorasel or to himself.

But the boys hadn't even heard his order. They were rushing the guards.

The impact was terrible. One of the guards was forced to turn a backward somersault; another was thrown into a continuous left cartwheel; and the third guard was tossed high in the air, landing right in front of Vorasel and Whitey.

"We were overwhelmed," he said.

Whitey tried an intuitive flanking movement toward the ladder of the ship but, as luck would have it, ran smack into one of the guards, who apparently had got the same idea. They both rolled on the ground, over and over. Vorasel, with Janlai behind him, reached the ladder just in time to grab the last boy's foot. "You again," said the boy. He kicked loose, slightly damaging Vorasel's forehead.

The ship's hatch was closing. "We had better get out of here," Vorasel shouted.

"But my boys! They'll be killed." Whitey's voice broke. "We were clumsy fools."

"Dalet's a good pilot, and there are good manuals on the ship. They'll read those."

"But we promised to die."

"Only from violence. Not from a spaceship's blast. And we didn't really promise."

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"I'm staying here."

"Carry him, fellows," Vorasel said.

The guards picked up Whitey skillfully. "It's unethical," Whitey said, trying to kick.

"Even my ethics are inadequate," Vorasel said sadly.

The guards hurried the depupilized teacher into the nearest pit-room. Janlai and Vorasel ducked in after them. The roar of the ship's motors penetrated the pit.

Whitey's lips moved, but nobody could hear what he said. Janlai stroked Vorasel's slightly damaged forehead with her fingertips. Soon there was silence.

"Goodbye, Storrin," Whitey said. "Goodbye, strange, twisted children. Safe voyage to Tagr."

"We may as well go home — or somewhere," Vorasel said. Janlai's fingertips were far from soothing, and tired patriots have their needs.

But before they could climb out, two visitors dropped in. They were the Chairwoman of the Committee of Bores and a precocious young member. "We know all about it," the Chairwoman said to Vorasel. "You failed completely to stop that Tagran and the delinquents."

"I did a very poor job," Vorasel said. "Having the guards was disastrous. It was the struggle with them that gave the boys just the extra impetus so they wouldn't change their minds. Besides, the guards were incompetent. They were overwhelmed and they even got in our way at the crucial time."

The Chairwoman gave the acrobats a look.

"The work was new to us," one of them said. He added complacently, "I was the worst. I accidentally knocked this teacher guy down."

The young bore looked pleased. He took a deep breath and started: "Why, my dear fellow, what you did was a service —"

The old bore cut him off, and went on herself: "— was a disservice to us all, especially to Whitey. Vorasel certainly deserves to be censured for the whole affair."

"If you're putting on this act for me," Whitey said, "you can stop talking opposites right now. I may have the slowness associated with my occupation, but I've finally got it through my head that Vorasel planned this thing from beginning to end to work out just the way it did. It was monstrous."

"Only in the sense we were dealing with monstrosities," Vorasel said calmly. "Your expression, I believe."

"Deporting those children! You can't justify it."

"They deported themselves."

"You led them to do it. It was wrong," Whitey said stubbornly, "even if Leu will be better off and I will be better off."

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"Absolutes — even absolutes of non-absolutism — lead to Tagrs," Vorasel said.

"Where do your methods lead?" Whitey asked bitterly.

"To the Committee of Bores," the Chairwoman said. "I was saving this for a private conversation, but since everything's indecently in the open I may as well tell you, Vorasel, that we want to put you on the Committee."

"You can't do that to me," Vorasel blurted, forgetting Whitey.

"Serves him right," Whitey said.

"I don't have the points," Vorasel said.

"We will award you special points for the efficiency with which you were inefficient," the Chairwoman said.

"Efficiency *is* boring," Janlai said, "especially when it makes fools of one's friends."

Vorasel noticed that his slightly damaged forehead wasn't being stroked any more.

"This is illegal," Vorasel said.

"Our legal advisor is incompetent."

"I'll refuse to serve."

"We'll call on you one at a time till we convince you. I used to know a young man like you. My, it must have been 70 years ago. . . ."

Janlai was sitting with Whitey now. "I'm thinking of building a new house, Whitey," she said. "Would you like to help me?"

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Whenever the waggish Mr. Tucker puts a standard theme of science fiction on his own peculiar witness stand, his cross-examination usually results in a complete revision of our thinking on the subject. Here is some such Tucker-elicited evidence, primarily on time travel, but testimony to other odd facts of fiction is ably presented. We're reasonably certain that Counsellor Tucker's argument will convince you that hitherto you have been all wrong about time travel itself, you have erred completely in your opinions on the nature of time travelers and their motives and, finally, you have never known the whole truth concerning the career of a certain giant of literature.

Able to Zebra

by WILSON TUCKER

HORACE REID kicked aside the thoroughly scanned copy of the New York *Times* and finished the last of the coffee in his breakfast cup. With no real interest he reached for the San Francisco *Chronicle* and lazily thumbed through its pages. Both of the papers were a day old and he had known the news they contained twenty-four hours ago, while it was still fresh, but still it was his daily chore to read those and the others littering the floor. Situated at the opposite ends of the country as those two were, they might contain some small item of purely local interest that his own Chicago papers would never know.

The important national news came over the radio of course. Listening to that too, was a weary chore. But it was the occasional regional story that needed his attention.

Horace dropped the *Chronicle* after awhile and reached for the coffee percolator. Empty. He looked over the table, found nothing more to eat other than the broken crusts of the toast, and resigned himself. Carefully lighting a cigarette, he reached for the morning *Tribune*.

The matter was on page eight.

Horace studied the story slowly at first, after working his way through the headline; he supposed he would never get used to the tight, compact, and

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not always sensible combination of words the headline writers here employed to gain attention.

PROF DENIES INDIANS
SWAPPED WAMPUM FOR PENNIES

Digesting that with but a second's hesitation he grasped the headline's message: some professor had denied that native aborigines exchanged their money for that of others. So? That was worth a headline? He swept on into the body of the story and was abruptly jerked to attention.

According to the brief dispatch, filed by AP from a small Illinois river town the preceding evening, a Professor Forrestor of State Normal University and his class of archeology students had unearthed a new Indian mound along the banks of the Illinois, one of many that had been located in the region. Other than the normal student excitement over the find, the opening and preparing of the mound had followed in the usual manner. A number of skeletons were uncovered, along with their paraphernalia: weapons, beads, pottery and trinkets. In one corner of the mound the definitely unusual turned up. The skeleton of a one-armed Indian was located, with that one bony arm wrapped possessively around a glass jar full of Indian-head pennies.

Horace stopped reading to consider that.

"By George!" he said. And then he giggled.

Old Forrestor at first believed he was the victim of a student hoax, a belief shared by a Mr. Jay Toliver, official representative of the state archeology society who was attached to the class on this field trip. Following an emphatic denial by the students, a minute examination of the find "proved" that no hoax was involved. Both Forrestor and Toliver agreed in declaring that the mound and its complete contents were of equal antiquity; the one-armed Indian and his strange treasure had been buried together about 400 years ago. Officials of the state and experts at the University of Illinois were hurrying to the scene.

Horace said "By George!" once more, and dropped the newspaper. The giggle spread across his face in a wide grin and soon he was laughing aloud.

From his bookshelf he pulled a large volume, leafing through it until he found a relief map of the state; after that he put in a long distance telephone call to the chief of police in the river town. Posing as a reporter for a radio wire service, he queried the policeman on the previous night's discovery and on recent developments since then. There were no new developments, he learned, except that carloads of people had arrived from the state capitol, the university, and every other city and town within a hundred mile radius

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to examine and gawk at the uncovered mound. It was creating quite a traffic problem, the chief declared. The mound itself? No, nothing new there — the experts still wrangled.

Horace thanked him and hung up. Carefully removing all traces of amusement from his voice and thoughts, he placed the palm of his hand close to his partly opened mouth and blew a hot breath on it, activating the metal plate beneath the skin. Presently there was a queer ringing in his ears.

"Zebra," he said to the palm. "Location: Love."

"Able here," the voice of a tired old man said in his ear. "Yes?"

Horace stifled an inner thrill. He had never spoken to Able before, had never made contact with anyone that highly placed in official circles. After all, Zebra was on the lowest rung of the seniority list and he seldom had the opportunity to know the really top persons and places. Able himself!

"I have to report an anachronism, sir."

"Oh my stars!" the old man said. "Another one? Your location is Love, did you say?"

"Yes, sir. I'm on change of duty, sir. I understand someone else is filling my former position on —"

"I know, I know all that!" Able interrupted testily. "I sent the substitute to Zebra myself. Very well, what is this one? And don't tell me its another magnetic motor!"

Horace took a deep breath. "No, sir. There haven't been any more of those since Hendershot in 1928. This is quite different. A university class opened a mass grave of native aborigines last evening, sir. They found in the grave a glass jar containing coins minted some 400 years later. The coins bore the images of those same aborigines, by peculiar coincidence, and were minted by the present-day government as a sort of token to them."

"Oh my, oh my, oh my," Able's tired voice ejaculated. "This is worse than I thought, this is much worse than the motors. Oh, this is dreadful!" He paused for a long moment and Horace could almost picture the old man ponderously shaking his head. "Tch, tch, tch. What is your exact location and date?"

"Chicago, Illinois," Horace told him, and added the street address. He shot a quick glance at the morning paper. "Wednesday, July 9, 1952."

"Oh my stars," Able repeated. "I'll have to send you assistance at once."

"Will that be necessary sir?" Horace broke in boldly. "I realize that I'm new here, but I'd like the chance to prove my —"

"No, no, positively no," the old one cut him off. "Out of the question young man — no reflection on your able judgment intended. This is far more serious than you may realize, far more serious indeed. That present government of yours . . . tch, tch. Who can I send you?"

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Horace waited, not daring to suggest. Vaguely in his ear he heard the ancient one running down the list of his operatives' code names. "Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Fox . . ." The cosmic leader paused briefly over Fox, considering that worthy for a moment before continuing his low rumble. Suddenly he raised his voice with decision. "I'll send you either Charlie or Dog . . . must look to see who is free right now. Make no move until arrival."

"Yes sir," Horace said with concealed disappointment.

"Out," Able said wearily. "Oh, my. . . ."

Horace dropped his hand to his lap, vaguely annoyed with the old one. He couldn't disobey his superior, but this was *such* a perfect opportunity to display his talents. Really the first opportunity he'd had, for his own little world was a dull place — nothing ever happened there. Perhaps if he —

Horace seized the phone book, searching for the addresses of the nearest library and a costumer's shop. He could at least lay the groundwork for a scheme shaping up in his mind, could at least *hope* to interest Charlie or Dog in the scheme. For a long moment he contemplated the newspapers on the floor and then he giggled once more. "I think it rather funny," he said to his apartment walls. "Just imagine, Indian-head pennies . . ."

Bottom-rung agent Zebra, alias Horace Reid in Chicago, lazily pushed himself up on the oversized bed and stretched. Another day, another stack of the native newspapers to go through, another struggle with the cryptic headlines, and another three or four meals of the delicious Love variety. The newspapers might not always make sense but the planet Love provided him with the most tempting, satisfying food he had ever known. His own little world of Zebra, a primitive and volcanic mudball, had nothing to compare with the edibles of Love.

Why, he wondered next, had Operative Love ever left Love, causing him, Zebra, to vacate Zebra and patrol Love during the man's absence? He moved over to the edge of the bed and dangled a bare foot. Code names were all right in their place too, but it tended to be confusing when the overseer of a planet temporarily left the place. To make it all simpler, why didn't Able patrol his Able, Baker take care of Baker, and so on down the line to Zebra on Zebra, with special trouble-shooters coming in during these emergencies? But no — that wasn't such a happy thought either. In that event he, Zebra, wouldn't have discovered the wonderful cookery of Love.

And returning to primitive Zebra after this tour of duty would be like returning to work after a very pleasant vacation.

Horace sighed and slipped out of bed to pad across the room in bare feet,

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liking the sounds his feet made on the floor. Pushing open the swinging door to the kitchenette, he stopped stockstill to stare at the blonde.

Primitive Zebra had no blondes like *that*, either!

She glanced up quickly from the small white stove and smiled at him, a beautiful thing to receive so early in the morning. "Good morning, Zebra. You're a late sleeper."

Horace brightened. "Charlie, sir?" he asked hopefully. This was wonderful, this was unexpected! To awaken and find a ravishing blonde person in one's kitchenette was an unusual treat — even though the blonde was one's superior officer. So *she* was to work with him on the case!

The girl shook her head. "Dog."

Zebra-Horace considered that doubtfully. She was, in the current vernacular, a cute trick, a rare dish, even though she held considerable seniority over him and he must remember to be properly deferential. He said respectfully, "We'll have to give you a new name here, sir. Chicago, 1952, might not appreciate a blonde dog."

"Agreed." She smiled that rare smile once more and continued the preparation of breakfast. "What name are you using here?"

"Horace Reid."

"Then I had best be Mrs. Horace Reid." There was a little more than just casual amusement in her voice. "I'll be staying here, and your people will talk."

"Yes, sir."

She indicated the meal on the stove and then motioned to him. "This is almost ready. Why not put on some clothes?"

Horace looked down at himself and ran for the bedroom.

Dog proved herself a remarkable cook. Working through the breakfast with appreciation and relish, Horace glanced up at her as the quick thought struck him.

"You've been here before."

"Briefly." She nodded the attractive golden head across the table. "During one of the earlier wars — something about tea and taxes, I believe." Her lovely brown eyes rested seriously on his face. "Don't let yourself like it too well. You can't stay."

"I can't help it," Zebra confessed. "You are a wonderful cook. Sir."

The girl abruptly switched the subject. "Tell me about your problem. Able was very upset, and very sketchy."

He outlined it to her while they ate, explaining the ancient customs among these particular aborigines of mass burial, together with their favorite weapons, their treasures and personal charms and omens. Today, certain sciences had advanced to the point where individuals and groups were now

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actively seeking and opening these burial mounds for study purposes. The grave opened two days before had contained, in addition to the usual accouterments, a most perplexing anachronism, a glass jar filled with coins minted by the present government some four centuries after the burial. This particular jar was found in such a position and condition that responsible authorities at the site were forced to only one conclusion: Indian and money had been buried together. The morning news reports — he indicated the papers on the floor — could shed no further light on the discovery. Most scientific authorities were taking a serious and puzzled view of the situation, and some government agents were already en route from the nation's capitol to examine the find, to study the coins for authenticity.

Dog shook her golden head. "That *is* bad. Quite obviously we can't substitute counterfeit coins, for that, too, would be anachronistic. What about the students?"

"Too late," Zebra-Horace answered. "If I could have reached one of them immediately after the opening of the grave, I could have arranged a hoax. But it is far too late now. The students are adamant — and just as puzzled."

"No wonder the old one was so upset." Dog drummed her fingers on the tabletop. "Do you suppose we can erect an ancient tunnel beneath the site? Arrange it so that the jar of money was brought into the tunnel and placed in the grave from below, merely as a hiding place?"

"No, sir, not there. The terrain and the nearby river forbid it. And too, I suspect that the external evidence on the jar proves its equal age, else the scientists involved would have by now passed it off as hoax or accident."

When she didn't answer, he continued.

"It's a peculiar type of humor involved, sir. These aborigines are called Indians by the present populace, and the coins are known as Indian-head pennies because they bear the image of an Indian. Do you appreciate that?"

"I appreciate it," she told him dryly. "But wait until you advance — you'll find some you won't think so humorous."

Zebra felt as though he had been set back in his place, forcibly reminded of his lower seniority and lack of cosmic experience. He said quietly; "Yes, sir."

"Don't sir me. The name is Dog." She smiled to take away the sting. "There aren't so many of the anachronisms left anymore — we've done a fair job of weeding them out. But still, now and then one turns up such as this and we have a job on our hands. Some of them are humorous, some are cruel, some subtle. Frankly, the latter aren't so difficult to dispose of; often they are *so* subtle as to defeat their own purpose and we are able to remove them before the truth is realized. The cruel and the humorous give us more trouble."

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Horace nodded sympathetically. "Children are like that — sometimes cruel, sometimes subtle, sometimes deadly in an innocent way."

"They are," she agreed. "And if we had recognized that fact earlier and watched them more closely, superintended their every idle hour as well as their training periods, all this wouldn't be necessary. That particular group of errant boys wouldn't have caused this mischief, wouldn't have made it necessary to set up a constant watch of the 26 worlds to undo their misdeeds." Dog waved a slim hand toward the morning sunlight spilling in the window. "You will notice they seemed to concentrate on this neighborhood."

"I haven't found anything on Zebra," Zebra told her. "Not in all the years I've been there."

"They probably never strayed that far — the teachers missed them early and did a quick job of rounding them up. Most of the troubles have appeared *here*, and in three or four other worlds. King had a bad time a few years ago."

"King?" Horace-Zebra questioned. "Oh yes — he's on the one with a dark star. King."

"The boys introduced sun dials on King. Poor King had an awful time rounding them up and explaining them away. Well —" she shrugged and made as if to push back from the table. "It can't happen again, and when we have finally erased the last anachronism, found and eliminated the last hybrid, the last childish joke, our job is over. So let us concentrate on the immediate problem. The hoax and tunnel angles are eliminated — have you thought of any other possible solutions?"

"Yes, sir," he told her eagerly. "I tried to interest Able, but he . . . Well sir, I favor a time machine explanation."

"*No*. Absolutely not!" Dog stood up too quickly and her chair toppled backward. "This planet does not have and will never have time machines, thank *Mechob* for small favors! Time machines are foreign to this world, unheard of — the people haven't so much as dreamed of them. You shall not introduce them as the solution!"

"Oh, no," Horace protested quickly. He left the table and hurried around to her. "I wasn't thinking of their *introduction*, sir, only the suggestion of same. A mere suspicion that they *might* exist. You see, sir, a peculiar situation exists here, one very ripe for exploitation. I feel sure we can use it to our advantage and sow suspicion. There is a phenomenon on this planet known as *science fiction magazines*. The natives are positively crazy about them. They publish incredible fantasy and science romances, wild adventure yarns of the prehistoric past, even wilder tales of the probable future. They print —" he broke off in frustrated eagerness.

"Please, sir . . . come with me. These science fiction things defy descrip-

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tion. You *have* to see them to believe them." He was gently tugging on her arm.

"Well . . ." Dog hesitated, searching his face. "You really think we can use them? Where is this —"

"Just down the block, sir. A book and magazine store." Zebra hesitated with a sudden bashfulness. "And, sir, I think perhaps you had best slip something over your shoulders." He carefully avoided a direct stare at her bare poitrine. "I may have something in the wardrobe . . . Chicago, 1952, er . . . uh. . . ."

Zebra led her gaily down the stairs of the apartment building and out onto the street, both of them blinking against the bright summer sun. Together they walked to the corner, skillfully avoiding caroming children on roller skates, to cross the intersection and continue down another street. Eagerly, Zebra pointed to a small sign swaying in the gentle breeze.

"There, see . . . Mahaffey's Rocket Shop. It is run by a young lady who formerly edited a science fiction magazine; she made a fortune and retired, to open this book store. Just wait until you see these things!"

"I wish I could share your enthusiasm," Dog said.

"The magazines are marvelous! Quite like our nursery tales, really. They constantly employ rocket ships, great inventions, fantastic battles, horrible monsters . . . anything. Nothing seems too wild for them, for their readers. And by the proper planting and use, our time machine concept *could* be made into an accepted thing here — fictionally, of course. We could so skillfully implant our idea that several writers would seize upon it, enlarge it, make it into a common device. We could cause the time machine to become as well-known as the rocket ship. And through these very magazines and books we could accomplish our misdirection."

They paused before the store and inspected a tiny display window. Zebra pointed silently to a row of magazines embellished with garish covers, and just behind them a row of books. The blonde Dog stepped closer to examine the magazine covers, glancing from one to another. Finally she looked up at her waiting companion.

"You needn't have been so concerned with my lack of clothing," she pointed out. "These women are wearing about the same."

Zebra-Horace fought away a slow blush. "These pictures merely illustrate the romances, sir. Quite typical of the fiction, and perhaps indoor family wear as well. But you musn't be seen like that on the streets." He moved in beside her to waggle an index finger. "These are only a sampling, there are dozens more inside. The publishers have designed them to appeal to all ages and tastes — from the cradle to the grave and from the schizoid to

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the scholar, so to speak. Their titles are frequently indicative . . . *44 Calibre Space Adventures* . . . *Wanton Worlds* (that cover is rather obvious, isn't it?) . . . *Universal Science Fiction*. I read that one myself; it's quite good. Shall we go inside?"

He held the door open for her, and followed her in, nodding at a young woman and a couple of boys near the back of the shop.

"That's Miss Mahaffey, the owner," he whispered. "The young males are *fans*."

"Are *what*?" Dog demanded.

"Science fiction followers — avid purchasers and readers. They read everything that is published — they and the millions like them are the ones I hope to dupe with my scheme."

Zebra and the girl stopped before a large rack of magazines. He reached for a couple, opened them at random and handed them to her. "As yet," he explained, "the time machine is unknown; you'll find no mention of such here."

"And your scheme?" she asked.

"Has two equal parts, sir; each part dependent on the other for the success of the whole. And I firmly believe that success will easily explain away the anachronism of the Indian coins.

"My plan is first to induce one of the science fiction editors to send a special correspondent to the grave site, a man having a splendid reputation in his trade and who would make a thorough, analytical study of the anachronism to finally arrive at the only acceptable answer according to his logic: a time machine."

"But there are no —"

"Please, sir, hear me out. Your objection is to the second part of my scheme, which will be taken care of. Now of course, the reserved scientific world will not believe our special correspondent — they'll laugh at him. *But* the science fiction readers, these fans will believe him! And as time goes on and no one else is able to offer an alternative theory, the correspondent's report will be more or less accepted. Thereafter, official government circles will either ignore the matter entirely, as is their wont, or they will engage in secret experiments looking toward the discovery and building of such a machine." Horace smiled. "This last would prove quite harmless, of course."

"I'm still dubious," the girl told him, glancing from the shelves to the fans loitering in the rear. "These magazines —"

"Have just about the proper historical background to fit our special needs," Horace broke in. "Let me brief you. The man or men who first published them were dreamers and visionaries beyond the norm; and in time so many of their dreams and prophecies came to pass that their fellow

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men took notice, thereby gaining for the magazines a small measure of fame. Some of the guesses and dreams proved remarkably accurate, you see. So accurate as to command attention. Of late, three other events have occurred which added greatly to the prestige of the publications, events giving them an added stature in the eyes of the public."

Dog listened skeptically, but in silence.

"The first of these occurences was the application of atomic power — more properly, raw nuclear fission of low order — for war use. The magazines had long since employed such power in their pages and one renowned writer had foretold atomic bombs. The one important event however was a story which closely described a bomb-detonating mechanism, a story published at the very moment the government was developing that mechanism in secret. It was so real that government security agents were alarmed, and naturally, after the close of the war, this news leaked out and widespread publicity followed. Vast sections of the reading public turned to science fiction, seeking other things their government may have hidden from them.

"Sometime following that, several of the magazines boldly attempted to explain a series of celestial objects termed *flying saucers*, or *discs*. While the military authorities declaimed and vainly suggested mass hallucinations, the magazines scoffed at their declaimers and set about proving otherwise, by photographs, eyewitness accounts and so forth. Again the result was widespread publicity and again large masses of the lay public swung toward the magazines. Their power was becoming strongly entrenched." He dropped his voice to a whisper. "That was how Miss Mahaffey made her fortune and retired to this shop. Her magazine was one of the leaders in the flying saucer mystery."

"And the third event?" Dog asked stolidly.

"The crowning achievement," Horace told her. "It was so new and revolutionary that it raised a storm in both lay and scientific circles. Science fiction magazines, early in their lives, introduced the idea of an orbital satellite, mainly as a sort of stepping-off place for interplanetary flights but also incidentally usable for observation and military control of the planet itself. These fictional *space platforms* were seized upon by one government and intensive research was begun to build and launch such an object. Before they could do so, however, they were conquered by a second government, which promptly took over the plans and started work on a platform of their own. Of course, the magazines were quick to point out that they had originated the concept many decades before — that the governments were merely copying their ideas again. The public applauded."

"I'm beginning to see your point. But go on."

"The result of all this — after many years — is a state of undeclared war

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between the magazines and the governments. In some few countries the publications are forbidden altogether. In others, severe restrictions are imposed upon them. Right here, in Chicago, no magazine is permitted to reveal that the critical mass of U-235 is just 22.7 pounds; yet that figure is common knowledge over much of the world. The magazines realize they have the upper hand because their editors and authors are years ahead of the politicians; whereas the politicians and bureaucrats do their best to hamper and restrict the magazines — rather naïvely believing they still have secrets the public at large is unfit to know. Unwilling to admit that thinking men the world over know their secrets, they regard the science fiction magazines as arch-enemies for revealing them, hinting at them, employing them in fiction. Caught squarely in the middle of course is the lay public — and this very situation is the weapon to solve our case.

"The public, now realizing they are in the middle, are swinging in ever-increasing numbers toward the magazines because these publications have been *so* right in the past, with the politicians *so* wrong or untruthful. Their distrust of the politician dates back for thousands of years. In short then, sir, if we suddenly introduce the startling concept of a time machine, the local government will immediately deny it. And the public, noting that denial, will believe the magazines."

The beautiful Dog replaced the magazines she had been holding. "Is there an alternative to the time machine?" she asked doubtfully. Suddenly she pointed to a book on a nearby shelf. "What about that man, Fort? Your predecessor used him to advantage."

"Oh, *no*, sir. Fort is a different sort of proposition altogether. The man is considered by most to be a crank or a crackpot and very few place any faith in him. My predecessor *did* use him well, but in a reverse manner. For instance, upon two or three occasions some of the natives have discovered what they term *magnetic motors:* the children's toys, really — I don't know if our truants left them behind on purpose or by accident. In the previous century, public curiosity wasn't what it is today, and the first two toys didn't present so much of a problem. But on the third occasion, my predecessor arranged to have the motor exposed and its finder labeled a jokester. He also saw to it that Fort seized upon it, as well as the two earlier examples. The misdirection worked very well there. But we can't use Fort, sir, his reputation being the opposite of what we wish to accomplish here."

Dog stalked along the aisle examining the books and periodicals, her eyes resting momentarily on the titles. *The Conquest of Space, The City in the Sea, The Haploids* . . . "You believe then that the time machine explanation is best?"

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"Yes, sir, I do! Knowing these people and their vivid imaginations, it seems to be the only sure solution."

"How quickly could you induce an editor to dispatch an investigator to the graves?"

"In an hour or less. We can place a man on the site this afternoon; and sir, we had best arrange to have the man release a part of his findings to tomorrow's newspapers. That will lay the groundwork and serve to establish the theory early, for the magazine itself will not be able to publish his findings for another month or two."

"Possibly you are right. I admit I can see no other solution. But wait — you said there were *two* parts. And what are you going to do about introducing the concept? I understand your solution as far as it goes, but —"

Zebra-Horace quickly caught her arm and guided her out of the book shop. The sun was still bright in their eyes. He led the way back to his apartment, talking rapidly.

"Introducing the concept *is* the second part of my plan, sir. I've done a bit of research at the library and have found the proper time and location to implant the concept. Several years ago, a writer did a series of articles for a paper called *Science Schools Journal*. These articles — he entitled them The Chronic Argonauts — contain a germ of an idea that we can put to our own use. I propose to visit that writer, to place him in economic jeopardy. The Chronic Argonauts — and our science fiction correspondent will serve us very well." They climbed the stairway.

"I don't know," the lovely Dog replied, frowning. She waited while the man unlocked the apartment door and stood aside to let her enter. "That sounds frightfully vague. . . ."

Zebra-Horace closed the door behind him, trying to hide his anxiety. She surely wouldn't dismiss his plan of action now! He ran over to the wardrobe and brought out some costumes he had rented, crossed the room again to fling open the door to an unused room.

"Please, sir . . . trust me? I want *so* much to prove my mettle to you and Able!" The gleaming metal framework of his time machine rested in the darkness of the inner room. Boldly, Horace vaulted into the saddle and held out his two arms to her.

After a moment's hesitation, Dog allowed herself to be lifted up into his lap. Horace threw a small lever.

It was early morning, the sun not yet over the rim of buildings across the street. A cold, swirling fog hung in the air, chilling them.

"We could have been better prepared," Dog said shortly. "Is this the right place?"

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"Yes, sir. This is known as Mornington Road. The man we seek lives in that rooming house across the way, with a lovely young woman who is not his wife. Their present circumstances aren't particularly pleasant. Both the writer and his lady friend are consumptive, his markets are falling off, no one seems very interested in his scientific articles, and his absent wife has presented him with a troublesome bill of divorcement. As a result, he is in a somewhat dejected mood and is considering moving to a house in the country." Horace made sure the shrubbery concealed his machine, and stepped out to explore the street. "Now. Presently he will come out in his night clothes to see what may be in the mailbox. At that moment I will approach him, and pass myself off as a visiting writer from the continent. I will instill in him the idea of rewriting The Chronic Argonauts as a scientific romance. And at this point I need your help, sir."

"My help? How?" She peered across the street at the house, annoyed with the damp fog.

Horace slipped a bit of paper into her hand. "This is the address of an editor named Henley, a good friend of our writer. Henley recently lost his magazine and is searching for financial backing to launch another. If you please, sir, I want you to journey about one week into the future and offer the financial aid the editor needs. With a new magazine in his hands, Henley is sure to request our writer for material. And in the meanwhile, I will have convinced the man to take a vacation in the country, and rewrite the articles."

"Zebra," she replied sharply, "I have heard of some fantastic schemes to explain or hide anachronisms during my career, but this one is the —" She broke off cautiously as a door opened across the street.

"*Please!*" Zebra-Horace implored. "Please sir . . . help me on this. This is my first big job! Go see that man Henley, and meet me back here in a few hours." He turned away from her and stepped into the street, calling across to the man in the doorway. "George! Hallo, there, George . . . is that you?"

The Chicago sun had grown quite warm and the streets were reflecting up the heat, making the city uncomfortable. Children skated more slowly if at all, preferring to lounge in the shade or spend their time in inviting doorways.

A confident Horace led the beautiful girl along the street, crossing an intersection to turn in another direction. Eagerly, he pointed to a small sign hanging motionless in the heat of day.

"Look, sir! Mahaffey's Time Capsule! Our friend's Chronic Argonauts has accomplished everything!" They paused a moment outside the store

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and inspected the tiny display window. Zebra pointed silently to a row of magazines embellished with garish covers, and just behind them a row of books. The blonde Dog stepped closer to examine the magazine covers, glancing from one to another. Finally she looked up at her waiting companion.

"The titles would certainly seem to indicate you are right," she conceded. "Just look at them: *Slave Goddess of the Time-Worm*, *Ravished in Time's Abyss*, *The Rape of the Time Maidens*." She shook her blonde head in wonderment. "All the writers seem to have caught the idea, Heinlein, Bradbury, Marlowe, Mudgett, Shaver, Byrdbatthe. . . ."

Zebra held the shop door open for her, followed her into the cool interior. He nodded to the young woman and a couple of boys near the back of the store.

"My plan of action must be a success, sir, and our special correspondent will visit the grave site this afternoon." He pointed happily to a shelf of books. "See — *The Omnibus of Time*, *Adventures in Time and Space* . . . we have planted well!" Zebra was searching the shelves carefully, eagerly, searching for a particular title. Suddenly he reached down to snatch a slim, blue volume from its resting place. "Here it is!"

Dog turned the book around to read the legend on the spine. "*The Time Machine*, by H. G. Wells. We did this?"

"Yes, sir, this started it all. That man in the rooming house —"

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Dog kissed him full on the lips. The shop mistress and the two fans turned to watch, startled.

"Zebra," the blonde said excitedly, "you are wonderful! I shall report this to Able with my highest recommendations. And do you know what we are going to do now?"

"Uh . . . no sir," he stammered, taken aback.

"Don't sir me," she reproved him. "The name is Dog. And until I am recalled to duty, the name is Mrs. Horace Reid."

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It is generally conceded that writers of historical novels should read some factual history, and that writers of science fiction should read some factual science. Neither rule, to be sure, is extensively followed in practice; but the desirability is recognized in theory. Writers of supernatural fiction, however, and particularly writers on witchcraft seem to gather their ideas from nowhere — or worse still, from the conventionalized fiction of other writers, with no regard to the factual lore on witchcraft gathered by such scholars as Christina Hole, Eliphas Levi, Jules Michelet or Montague Summers. Happily, Leslie Bigelow, professor of English at Arizona State (Tempe), is an exception to this rule. The Sorcerer's Apprentice *is no amusing scherzo, like its Goethe-Dukas-Disney eponym, but an unusually convincing study of the exact nature of witchcraft, as evinced in history . . . and as it might still arise even in this unbelieving age.*

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

by LESLIE BIGELOW

THE FACULTY of any university is a yeast-pot, fermenting trivial rancors and neuroses. A good instance was the feud between Professor Paul, the specialist in Cambodian history, and my chess acquaintance, Professor Tyana of the department of English. It began with a misunderstood remark, passed into a snarl, and ended in hatred and unbalance. Just *how* it ended, Tyana himself must tell.

When Professor Tyana died three days ago, after an odd brief illness, I was asked by the Dean of Arts and Sciences to inventory his effects. Having at last located a cousin, I sent her his meager furnishings — all but certain books, a doll, and these sheets. The good lady has her own tidy Kansas world, in which Professor Tyana's apprentice need not sprawl.

From Tyana's notebook a good many scattered scribblings have been pieced together here. I have guessed at a few illegible words. And the position of that odd — in fact, that dangerous — passage entitled *How to*

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Destroy a Person is conjectural. With these small aids, Professor Tyana himself speaks:

I

On Sunday afternoon, January 22, I determined to kill a young woman. The following week I perfected my plans.

If it should be argued, "Why turn your powers to a trifle?" I must answer, "What *are* trifles?"

If it should be argued, "Emma Mundhorst is the mere creature of her training, the brief and vulgar emblem of her family strains," I do not even bother with rebuttal. On that logic, who would ever suffer? And Emma — I shall enjoy killing Emma; rather, I shall enjoy knowing that she is dead.

For cheap reasons, I have always enjoyed teaching: the sense of empire in the classroom; the flattering twinkle at a sly sally; the tension as my eloquence discloses a man, or a book, or an idea — and best of all, the opportunity of imposing my own views by clandestine hint. Once I'd have argued that all my reasons were not cheap; that to communicate at the top of one's powers is not cheap, but is rather to withstand ignorance, and even to dilute by a little the rancid ocean of man's unreason. But now I suspect the whole effort to be in vain. Mankind is ineducable — except by calamity.

Still, I enjoy teaching, and propose to continue to enjoy it. In faculty meetings, to the tune of Professor Paul's picayune blather, with its superficial air of kindliness and generosity, I sit with special pleasure, knowing what I know. I shall sit with greater relish having, in Emma, struck at the grossness which fouls our universities, like fat on cold soup. And after Emma — look to yourself, Professor! Look to yourself, you pompous fool!

Emma Mundhorst entered by Chaucer class in the fall quarter: fat, or rather, lardy; pimpled, sullen, dirty. Her thin black hair twisted back, her shapeless hands, her clothes, her shoes — all these are nothing in themselves, but were Emma's fit vesture. Through her glasses, from the angular cage of her skull, glimmered the ancestral squelch. The pure type. The unreachable lump. At first she disturbed me, then annoyed me, then settled into a nagging worry. Against that clot of suet the finest phrase was muffled, the nicest paradox in vain, the deepest resonance frustrate.

Emma sat in the back row, at my extreme left. Although it was unnecessary even to look at her, she became a clog on my lectures. Asked a question, she answered (even when relevantly) with a cloddish slurring of every significance, every value. True, she had a memory, even as the sliced vegetable retains the cut. Thus she learned Middle English tolerably well. But she did not rise even to misunderstanding, since she really formed no conceptions to mistake.

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Thus, on a Sunday of the sixth week I determined to destroy Emma.

Monday, I asked her to wait for a moment after class. Now, ordinarily a student, thus summoned, rises from the anonymity of mere class member to the status of individual, with whom the professor may then be an individual, too. But Emma receded even farther. The pale eyes glimmered. I shivered in dismay.

"Miss Mundhorst," I said, "about your term paper . . ."

"Oh, good Lord, have I got to write a term paper?"

"You may remember that it was assigned several weeks ago. Now, I wish you to handle a rather special topic."

"I won't have hardly no time. I wait table. Weekends I got to go home to help father in the store. All I want is to get my certificate and get back to my school." Emma had been perfidiously used by the state. For several years she had taught, God knows who and God knows what. Now the state insolently asked that teachers go to school for a little while themselves.

I reassured her, "I don't believe that this topic will put you out particularly." I understood her to mumble that it hadn't better, and went on, "I'd like you to check this point. You know, when Chaucer wrote — by the way, just when was that?"

"How would I know? After Milton, I guess."

"Yes. To be sure. Milton was born in 1608. Now, when Chaucer wrote, in the 1380s and 1390s, almost everybody believed in witchcraft: that is, in the possibility of forming an alliance with hell and gaining satanic powers."

To myself I apologized for speaking so. Witchcraft! Two million persons die horribly between 1400 and 1700, accused of witchcraft, convicted of witchcraft, condemned for witchcraft. Many die having confessed, which is no wonder if you like, under the coaxing of the boot and cage. But many die convinced that they *were* witches, that they *were* warlocks, that hell spoke through them on earth.

Witchcraft! One of the great convulsions of all history, hence ignored by the historians — save for such half-disreputable enthusiasts as Levi and Summers. A key to unlock the human mind, hence ignored by the psychologists. The envelope, moreover, of many truths, hence derided in an age whose governing principle (for all the superficial rage for science) is indifference to evidence. How often have I argued with that fool, Professor Paul!

I went on, "Almost everybody believed in witchcraft. In fact, everybody was *obliged* to believe in it by the church. In some theologies, a disbeliever is still a heretic."

"A disbeliever?" There had been a flicker of her attention. She seemed almost to ask, "*Are* there disbelievers?"

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"Now, Chaucer was a man of balance. I'll give you a list of all the terms he might have used in reference to witchcraft: *juggler*, *tregetour*, and so on. Then you check the concordance, examine every passage, and we'll estimate his tone, whether believing or disbelieving."

"Disbelieving?" Again that odd flicker. Emma seemed for an instant alive.

"Suppose we start."

For three weeks I cheerfully endured her obstinacy; asked her to conferences, implored her to them; solicited her interest with spry comment and arresting fact. I conjured up Gilles de Rais and the Marquise de Brinvilliers, described the reverse Mass at the witch coven, erected a special psychology, and summoned devils into the very air before us — at whom she gazed, potato-like.

The Chaucer problem was soon settled: he was no believer. Indeed, his settled "common sense" in this matter, as in others, accounts for his want of the ultimate poetic flavor. A wonderful man, a wonderful fellow, often as tender as anybody has ever been, yet he was the enemy of high dream. He was too fond of his own Wife of Bath, who most gleefully knew a thing or two — but did not know a thing or three.

Carefully I reserved my own view. At this time I disclosed no secret knowledge, for I wished only to begin the aura of strangeness. And an odd thing: in a sense I seemed to tell Emma nothing new. Oh, she had never heard of Gilles de Rais, but he was not really a stranger to her. In fact, she was like some hot-gospeler, annoyed by any sophistication of matters as patently "true" as earth and air and fire and water.

A background of common fact established between us, I proceeded to a step against whose grisliness I implored sturdiness of stomach. For now I must create a personal relationship. Here the road was plain, however miry. The guiding principle, of course, is to congratulate a person on his defects, and to discover recondite charm in the appalling.

"You know" — diffidently — "you know, your hair is really very interesting. Quite different." A flicker passed over her attention. "Perhaps these mere lads do not see your quality, but an older man . . ."

Gradually Emma softened. I learned a little of her life: no past, no present, no future. But this judgment was really very stupid of me, for it was only my exterior comment on her world, in which she seemed to move, if without vitality at least without dismay.

Gradually, too, the air grew tense between us. She became horribly aware of me, hence of my ideas. Flickers of psychic communion little by little burned bright; and then I was twice sure and she was twice damned. Twice damned, because now, aside from the *fact* of the powers I planned to marshal, she believed the fact. The mere fact would answer, in defiance of whatever

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disbelief. The mere belief would answer, in defiance of whatever fact. Both together were doubly fatal.

Reviewing my stratagems thus far with pleasure, I set down a pattern for the ruin I proposed, amending in this written theory the revealed errors of my practice:

How to Destroy a Person

First of all, he who must die must be awakened, truly awakened, to the wonder of everything, to the wonder of the trite adventures of everyday: how he sets this foot before the other, without taking thought; how the congregations of the sky wheel in predestinate minuet; how everything begins in mystery and, followed to its close, goes out in mystery; finally, how the understanding is a tiny firelit circle, hemmed by midnight shapes, almost seen, but never seen; forever heard, but never heard for sure.

This may be done in part with rhetoric. For there is a power beyond the syllable-counting of grammarians in rolling phrases, cloudy with immense sound, which say little but hint everything. The iron-clanging antithesis, the divining paradox — these veil what is (or seems to be) with a shimmer of strangeness, like heat waves dancing. Shrouded in this veil, the world may then be dandled like a sorcerer's toy; and the littlest thing, a seed, a sparrow, may be strangely lit, as though by the brief flare of a falling star.

The brain made sensitive with words, next summon up the wonder of odd fact: how the universe itself is at once bounded but without bounds; how mere motion is somehow weight, the ocean liner at sea weighing a little more than the ocean liner at wharf; how a man on a far-off star, receiving reflections from this earth, might today watch *Hamlet* being presented for the first time at the Globe Theater, 350 years ago.

The strangeness of the world doubly confirmed, move to the strangeness of the mind: how the cage of the skull jails atavistic tags from life's whole complex pageant, the lurch of protoplasm and the scream of the pterodactyl; the ghoul-scared memories of man's own primeval past, the split dreams of infancy, and the muddled arabesque of the two mingling family strains. Remark the senses, then, how they cheat, imperfectly relating to an imperfect brain news of a world which is there — if there at all — in quite other terms than we may possibly define.

Great John Wycliffe prophesied: the world must perish in the year 1500. And perhaps it did. Perhaps it was very wise of great John Wycliffe to prophesy: the world must perish in the year 1500.

For perhaps it did.

All certified strange, the mind indicted, the senses proved oblique, the world itself reeling in midnight apocalypse, what can then be called strange?

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So: whisper of the monkey and the goat, the demon of the abyss, chaos and old night.

And then the particular channel of damnation: one line of inquiry deeply searched by a mind bewitched; its logic established, its psycho-geography limned, its sinister lure dangled. And hoy! Hey, presto! 'Tis done! Down the chute!

Weave a spell around him thrice, and DESTROY! DESTROY! DESTROY!

II

But for Emma, no need of theory delicately spun, or logic tenderly drawn out. For Emma, image magic.

"If you wish to harm someone," I said, "you form an image like him. Wax is best. A likeness is a good thing, but a good likeness is not needed. Secure a nail cutting of your enemy's, a strand of hair, whatever once was of him. For his essence lies in whatever was of him, as well as in his bowels and brain."

Suddenly she said, "A flake of skin is best. A flake of skin sloughed from frostbite."

"Skewer your waxen man," I said. "Melt him slowly. Press him between sheets of lead or scarify him with a thousand cuts. Kill him as you like."

Emma said, "In boiling grease. A little at a time."

Here I should have sat alert. Here I should have ransacked Emma. Indeed, I tried. But what she knew, what she was learning elsewhere, was embedded unreachably, like a fossil in a mountain. I could not disentangle it. I did not try as I should have tried, for vanity rushed me on. Instead I hurried to wave the fabric of the fatal dream. I murmured until a fume of danger coiled from the very words. The firelit circle of understanding retreated before the midnight of dubiety pressing in. In the very act of our affection, everyday faded from banality until its essence grinned at us like a bleached skull. Dayness, the dayness of all-day. The words danced a dangerous dance. In menace, the syllables slid shining and deadly. "It is invaluable," I said, "to have the assistance of the devil."

"Others are more powerful."

"Others?"

"The others."

Of course I should have paused. But on I hastened. So sped the scheme. Vegetable though she was, she livened to the tautness in the air. Speculation and surmise cleared ancestral tracks upon her face. And I quickened, too. For the popular fool is no more folly-eaten than when he thinks of words as mere scribbles on a page, or waifs of sound in the air. Words kindle, words

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besiege. Fired into the brain, words do not, because words can not, leave the brain as they find it. In cunning mesh they overlay what seems to be with what is said to be, which at the arc of divination is what is and must be. *In the beginning was the word.* . . .

"Emma," I said, "a waxen image is a trifle. But all else is trifling — or it is tremendous."

Absently she said, "It doesn't matter."

"But the image is the lever by which the invisible world may compel gross and visible forms."

Her odd awareness faded away. She said, "What did you say?"

In lectures on Chaucer I now presented to class a résumé of historical magic. Simon Magus flew before the emperor Nero and before us in the Colosseum, until Simon called Peter felled him with a prayer. Before us Daniel Home bewitched Sir William Crookes. Incantations were rehearsed, witch doctors summoned, the dead interrogated. A teasing mood of absurdity was endorsed.

But one day Professor Paul stopped me in the corridor of the main recitation building. "I believe that one of my majors, a Miss Mundhorst, is a student of yours?"

"Yes?"

"Miss Mundhorst is hideous, stupid, and vulgar."

"You state the matter with precision."

Professor Paul spoke urgently, "But Miss Mundhorst did not elect to be any of these things."

"Ah?"

"Professor Tyana! *You* are clever."

"Ah?"

"And you are corrupt."

"Ah?"

"And worst of all, you are vain."

"My dear Professor Paul. Our race is condemned to vanity. We have the option between that and folly. It is easy to perceive *your* choice."

Professor Paul did not answer. For an instant I was able to credit the stories of his charm. Then he said, "Professor Tyana, you will stop your meddling with Miss Mundhorst."

"Ah?"

"Yes, you will stop your meddling."

"Or?"

Professor Paul said, "There is always balance. There are many magics. Always, white defeats black."

"My dear fellow! And you know what is white and what is black?"

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Chuckling, I hurried on to class. "As for image magic," I said to them, "suppose we come to a clearer idea of what was entailed. Miss Delehaye, I wonder if you would make a little wax doll of, oh, say Miss Mundhorst, and bring it to class some time next week?"

Expensive and pert, Miss Delehaye smiled. She was rich and she was liked. Worse still, from the view of a rancorous Emma, Miss Delehaye deserved to be liked. She was intelligent and she was sweet.

The doll before us, we examined the practice and psychology of image magic. The university paper ran a little skit about these classes, and impaled dolls of the president and dean ran through the brief popularity of a campus fad. And then, Emma.

"By the way, Miss Mundhorst, what do you think of Miss Delehaye?"

"What do *I* care about that stuck-up thing?"

"But surely you have an opinion. She seems very attractive. Is she a friend of yours?"

All underprivilege, ugliness, and envy spoke through Emma. "Stuck-up thing! Thinks she's smart, all those clothes. Dressed up like I don't know what. Who does she think she is?"

"You know, Miss Mundhorst, she said a funny thing about the little doll."

"What did she say?"

"She said a very funny thing. She said that at the sorority house —"

"Sorority house! Stuck-up painted things!"

"She said that all the girls made the doll together, and when it was finished they took a hot knife, and they all laughed, and then by candlelight . . ."

I strove to make the fiction vivid: motive, detail, consequence. Emma hated Miss Delehaye. She hated all Miss Delehayes. The converse of that medal was fear. Emma feared the great world in which they wielded the complex powers of wealth, fortified by banks, and social protocol, and a thousand discriminations, meaningless to her. Emma's fear was easily great enough for her ruin. But it was a fear qualified in some way. Her odd flash of special knowledge flickered in the pale eyes, and I tried once more to account for her air of listening with satisfaction to the inaudible. I seemed to see her, squat and hideous, alone on a great plain at night, arms lifted elementally to a riven sky.

But she was afraid. The sense of my long preparation reverberated in her skull. She felt the mysterious complex of the great world pitted against her bestial sources: a kaleidoscope of gleaming cars, rich furs, the opera; all summoned by some inexplicable pentagram, mingled in one terrible menace and in one dreadful enemy. Emma was afraid.

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Thus, I could see her end. She had really no safe avenue, once set fearing. She might literally die of it, as the waxen doll would grotesquely waste away under the hot knife. She might not die. But the very fear was ruin, for it would attract destroying circumstances like a magnet; indeed, would create them. *He who is afraid shall have much to be afraid of.*

I summed up all in a last incantation. The world reeled in phantasmagoria. Stricken, reality fluttered before us, like a bird festooned with leeches. My task was done. I was a little weary, but I had only to watch. Classes moved to a cheerful music, and I even forgot Professor Paul.

III

My apartment opens from the second floor hallway of a great frame house, grotesque with turrets and octagonal windows — a boarding house before the university dormitories went up. This March evening the door was open, and the glaring bulb of the hallway lit the wide, brown-painted boards of the hall floor. At my desk I looked out the window.

Then suddenly Emma was there, in the doorway. The hanging bulb silhouetted her figure, squat, distent, a sullen granitic image. Her pudding face was powerful with lines shadowed from the glow. Her lard figure was arrested in a bulk of power. Even the hideous green dress, the short, cheap coat, the run-over shoes, were something neither funny nor pathetic.

"Good evening, Miss Mundhorst."

She said nothing.

"Won't you come in?"

She said nothing, and she did not move.

Suddenly, though she did not move, the lamplight glinted from her glasses. It was as though the glint came from her side of them. Then for a moment I saw a shadow behind her, as of someone listening.

"Good evening, Professor Paul."

Slowly, the shadow vanished.

Emma said, "Miss Delehaye told me. About the doll. You lied to me."

"Ah, Miss Mundhorst? I would lie to a young woman with such exquisite hair?"

She said, "Others are more powerful." Then she said something I could not follow. It was as though she did not speak at all, but was instead the instrument of another speaker. Her language tolled like a surly bell; it rumbled with the massive *-um* ending of Latin. When she stopped, a vibration continued in the air, a heavy hum, like the rumble of a distant gun.

Then she flung something skittering across the carpet to my feet. Without going, she was gone, and I saw the toy: a tiny waxen man, myself, intact.

The tiny man was perfect. The texture of the serge suit was delicately

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etched. Each separate brown hair lay distinct.

The tiny man had needed exquisite labor. Emma? Those swollen hands?

And the tiny man had seemed intact. But on the underside of the left wrist the skin gaped. A nerve was laid open, beautifully modeled, raw and exact, like the colored illustration of a medical text.

Emma?

For this was a Cambodian device. Those little creamy men, their minds the minds of the strangers who reared the Khmer fastnesses and dwelt in Angkor-Thom, relish intricate gambits of pain. Not for them the western grossness — the rack, the boot, the screw. Faugh! Instead, cut minutely, cut with art. Play upon that nerve with a needle, little by little, day by day, and your man dies in four or five days of screaming. He dies intact.

And Emma still seemed to stand there, gross and terrible, your true witch — why had I not thought of that? In herself, nothing; but fastened by some corrupt tendril to whatever spoke through her; a bestial pythoness through whom darkness muttered. A mere — my left wrist twitched.

I summoned all my knowledge. I summoned my familiars. I strove to reverse time. But the cut was not in time, but in Time; it lingered. I bent to its removal that art which imprisons demons in the pommel of a sword, that art which animates a brazen statue, endowing him with articulate speech. In vain. It lingered.

A certain rueful courage should lie at one's command. I summon it. Only, I am angry, and I am penitent, and I am regretful. I am angry because I was stupid. I am penitent because I was vain. And I am regretful because now I may not inquire into a world enlarged for me, too late.

The suns drench space with testimony. The void fumes with invisible significance. Outside the flaming ramparts of the universe, entrenched Nothing beleaguers Time. Man is a toy, and I am a stupid man. Man is a fool, and I am a nasty fool.

My wrist — it hurts.

Thus Tyana's own account closes.

Of course I inquired, obliquely, among my colleagues. While there was no scandal about Emma, there are rumors of Professor Tyana's last hideous days in Mercy Hospital. "Finally," say the nurses, "Finally, no amount of morphine . . ."

In faculty meeting I listen with special care to Professor Paul. Tyana was wrong. It is not blather; and despite all I have learned from those books I did not send Tyana's cousin, I should not wish to outrage Professor Paul.

And Emma?

Why, Emma is teaching in a South Dakota kindergarten.

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Apparently there is no sphere of human activity that Cleanth Penn Ransom will not attempt to jar out of its accustomed orbit. Now we see the great man as musician, seated one day at the organ and even more ill at ease than his audience. As is to be expected, it does the patient MacTate no good whatsoever to seat himself in the very last row of that audience.

The Malignant Organ

by H. NEARING, JR.

"*Musica*," said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, of the Mathematics Faculty, "*est arithmetica nescientis se numerare animae*." He brandished the green bottle he was holding. "In other words —"

"*Animi*," said Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy.

"What?"

"*Animi*." MacTate started down the steps of the University hospital. "*Nescientis animae* means 'the innocent soul.' You mean *nescientis animi* — 'music is the arithmetic of the subconscious mind.' "

"All right." Ransom clutched the green bottle to his little belly and trotted down the steps with MacTate. "The words don't matter anyway. What Schopenhauer means —"

"Leibnitz, old boy."

"Now listen, MacTate." Ransom reached the bottom of the step, turned, and jabbed a finger at his colleague. "It's Schopenhauer. I just read it. It's in —"

"He quotes it, old boy. From Schelling, if I remember rightly. Who in turn quotes it from Leibnitz." MacTate pursed his lips. "With all due respect, I'm not sure any of them knew what he was talking about."

"Well, it's worth looking into, anyway," said Ransom. "What if you could learn to work a harmonic analysis by ear, or feel a differential equation in your bones. Like music."

MacTate rubbed his left eyebrow. "I'm not sure the bones are constructed to do that sort of thing very well. I rather think —"

"No, no. Not your bones." Ransom shook his head impatiently. "It's your brain. You feel things *in* your bones, but you do it *with* your brain." He held up the bottle. "So that's what I'm going to work on. The brain."

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MacTate smiled. "Rather an odd shape for a brain, don't you think?"

"Don't be silly, MacTate. This isn't a brain. It's a brain tumor."

"A what?" MacTate looked at the bottle warily.

"Brain tumor. Special kind, very rare in the brain." Ransom tucked the bottle affectionately under his arm. "They took it out old Prof. Schweingeweine this morning. You know. In the Music Department."

MacTate stared at the bottle with an expression of disgust that threatened to turn into nausea. "Good heavens, Ransom. What do you want with a thing like that?"

"Well, when he began having these headaches not long ago," said Ransom imperturbably, "he started to hear music when there wasn't any. Schweingeweine. Then they opened him up and found this thing between his first and second temporal lobes — where the sound-memory center is. You know. So I figured if he was sort of calculating music, you might say, it would be a good idea to experiment with the thing that was doing it. To him, I mean. He told me before the operation I could have whatever they took out of him. So I put it in some preservative, and now I'm going to —"

"See here, Ransom." MacTate backed away a few steps. "If you had me meet you here to be a party to your ghoulish —"

"No, no." Ransom laughed benignly. "I need you in a purely professional capacity. Nothing to do with this." He beckoned to MacTate and set off down the street. "I've got to go over to the auditorium to practice, and you being an aesthetician —"

"Practice?" MacTate looked suspiciously at the bottle.

"Now stop looking that way, MacTate. I tell you it's got nothing to do with the tumor. This tumor, I mean." He grinned. "It's the Dean's wife. She's sort of taken this sorority under her wing. The Sigma Epsilon Xi, or whatever it is. And she runs it like a women's club. Goes around hogtieing the faculty for free lectures and stuff. She's making me play the organ."

"Why, Ransom. I didn't know you —"

"She invited a bunch of us to a cocktail party and tricked us into admitting if we had ever taken lessons on anything. First thing we knew, she had this musicale arranged. She wants to sort of improve the sorority culturally and launch the new electronic organ with one blow. Or whatever it is you do to virgin organs." Ransom waved toward the center of the campus. "You know. The one they got for the Music Department to practice on. In the basement of the auditorium. I'm the lead-off man on the program, so I've got to start getting in shape. It comes off next Wednesday at — what did she call it? 'Tea time.' "

MacTate smiled. He was beginning to forget his colleague's ghoulishness. "What particular selection are you rendering?"

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"Massenet's 'Élégie.' I'm going to hop up the tremolo to give it lots of schmaltz. I want those girls to feel music till it hurts." He brandished a fist and grinned. "That's why I need you. For advice on the esthetic effect."

The new organ was in a hall at the end of the corridor in which the Music Faculty had their offices. Ransom set his bottle on top of it, turned it on, and tried the tremolo at full. He shook his head critically. "Got to be wigglier than that. Where's the tubes?" He looked around. "Here." He opened a door in the wall behind the organ and reached inside. "Push down a key, MacTate. Let's see how it is now."

MacTate laid a gingerly finger on a white key toward the center of the lower manual. The organ emitted a hideous grating bleat.

He jerked his finger away. "Good heavens, Ransom! What did you do to it?"

Ransom nodded. "It's a little rich, I guess." He reached into the tube closet again.

A door banged down the corridor and a series of irate footsteps clanged on the stone tiling.

"What are you doing here? Get away from that organ. Don't you know it's the property of the Music Department?" A slender young man with neurotic eyes swept out of the corridor. He clutched his hair with both hands. "How can I work when you —"

"What are you talking about, Flugel?" Ransom pulled his head out of the closet. "This organ is the property of the whole —"

"Oh. I might have known it was you, Ransom," Flugel said nastily. "For your information, the Music Department keeps a schedule of people who have permission —"

"Look, Flugel." Ransom scowled. "You don't have to start throwing your weight around just because Schweingeweine's in the hospital. I'm supposed to practice here, and I'm going to." He reached into the closet again.

"Ransom! You get out of there." Flugel lunged wildly around the organ to guard the closet. As he passed Ransom's green bottle, his shoulder struck it, knocking it with a dull crash onto the manuals. The organ bleated again. From the manuals something dripped down on the pedals.

"Flugel! You damned, neurotic —" Ransom looked at the organ with horror-struck eyes. "What have you done? That was Schweingeweine's tumor. You've — ruined it."

Flugel clutched his hair with both hands. "Wouldn't you just. Wouldn't you just. Look at it. Glass all over everything. And that foul —" He swung around to face Ransom. "Look here, Ransom. You get busy and clean this up. We can't —"

"What's the matter with you, Flugel? You knocked it off." Ransom stuck

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out his little belly pugnaciously and advanced on the wild young man. "Besides, you've ruined —"

"Ransom." MacTate was pale, and his mouth was curled oddly. "Let's get out of here."

Ransom looked at him. "All right." He glared at Flugel. "But you haven't heard the last of this, Flugel. You can't go around ruining valuable specimens of —"

"Ransom!" MacTate headed for the corridor.

"Now you wait a minute." Flugel waved his arms violently. "You can't go away like this and leave —"

Ransom glared at him again, turned on his heel, and followed MacTate.

MacTate recovered eventually by concentrating on the sense of relief it brought him to reflect that Ransom's devious biological intentions had been thwarted. Ransom, on the other hand, soon forgot the loss of his valuable specimen in worrying about the success of his performance.

"I can't go back there to practice," he told MacTate the day before the musicale. "I'll break his neck if I see him again. And I keep rehearsing on the piano, but it isn't the same. I don't —"

"Well, old boy. Just do the best you can. Nobody's expecting to —that is, I don't want to belittle the program, but you *aren't* a professional musician. It will come off better than anyone expects, I'm sure."

"Damn it, MacTate, you sound like the Dean's wife. That's what I mean. I can't be that bad. But if I go down there to practice —" Ransom sighed.

When the fatal hour arrived the following afternoon, the hall in the basement of the auditorium was half-filled with young ladies, looking polite, from whom radiated faint but pervasive auras of party perfume. A few of them were accompanied by desolate-looking young men. In the back row, as far from the organ as he could get, sat MacTate.

The Dean's wife, after enunciating a few thousand well-chosen words about the higher things, introduced Ransom and sat down behind her bosom among the performers in the front row.

Ransom got up, went to the organ, and grinned nervously at the audience. The Dean's wife clapped convulsively, setting up sympathetic vibrations among the girls behind her.

Ransom sat down at the organ, turned it on, and bent sideways to put his foot on the proper pedal. Between the pedals he saw lines of a dark red substance. He straightened up and looked at the manual keys. In the cracks between them were similar dark red lines. They did not occur haphazardly but appeared in every crack. He touched one and found it something like hard rubber. He shrugged, sighed, set a few stops, and pushed down on a pedal E to begin the "Élégie."

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Abruptly through the hall boomed the theme statement of Bach's *Passacaglia in C minor*. Ransom sat frozen, staring at the manuals. When the first variation began, he came to and tried pounding on the keys and stamping on the pedals to make them stop. But the keys and pedals not participating in the variation were unyielding, as if locked in place. He looked at the audience, saw rows of open mouths, and began to move his arms up and down the manuals with the music. There was nothing to do but fake it to the end.

The organ seemed to enjoy itself more with each variation. It depressed the volume pedals, flicked stops, invented strange mixtures. It howled exuberantly in the crescendos, then sank to sinister mutterings. It roared, whimpered, caroled, cursed, seduced. Ransom found himself wishing he were in a position to appreciate it.

But as the *Passacaglia* came to its final note, he remembered that organs cannot work without power. He snapped the switch just as the last sound was dying, sprang off the bench, and began to mop his face with a handkerchief.

The audience sat stunned for a moment. Then the Dean's wife was on her feet, and the girls began screaming an ovation. The Dean's wife and his fellow performers charged at Ransom with breathless compliments.

"Had no idea —"

"Tremendous —"

"Must have more —"

"Yes, forget about us. We want —"

"Do you know the Widor symphonies?"

"No, no. MacTate!" Ransom staggered back from his admirers. "No, listen, I — MacTate!"

Suddenly, from the corner of his eye he saw the red light on the power switch glowing like a baleful eye.

"My God. I —" He tore himself away from the Dean's wife, leaped back to the organ seat and began to move his arms just as the thing started a Franck chorale. His admirers returned happily to their seats.

When the chorale was over, Ransom clicked off the power switch. Immediately it was clicked on again. The organ began a Frescobaldi ricercare. From that it went to the "St. Anne Fugue," a Schumann canon, and three transcriptions from Chopin, and finally began to improvise variations on *Down by the Old Mill Stream*.

Ransom, in spite of the pressures of his situation, managed to feel a lapse of dignity at this point. It occurred to him suddenly that he was probably stronger than the organ. At the end of the next variation he clicked off the switch and pressed down on it with the forefingers of both hands. He could feel the thing trying to push up again, but it was no match for him. He

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leaned firmly on the switch and he looked helplessly at the Dean's wife.

She put on a sorrowful expression, rose to her feet, and swirled around to face the audience. "Girls," she said, "I am sure I speak for all of us when I say that we are all Deeply in Professor Ransom's debt for giving us this Beautiful, Beautiful Music. And to show how Deeply we appreciate the Strain which he has been under in Wedding us to these Beautiful selections, I should like to ask all of us to leave Quietly, without further applause, until we can prevail upon Professor Ransom to Again Enchant us with his Beautiful playing."

The girls looked startled, as if Ransom had just died, and began to tiptoe out of the hall. The Dean's wife went up to Ransom. For a moment he thought she was going to hug him to her Bosom, but she only beamed ecstatically, clasped her hands together, and made an emotional sound in her throat. Then she turned and followed the girls.

MacTate went out with the others. Ransom began swearing under his breath when he saw him go. But when everybody was gone, MacTate stuck his head around the edge of the corridor, surveyed the empty hall, and came back in.

"You can let go of it now, old boy. What on earth happened?"

Ransom sank weakly on the bench and mopped his face again. The organ immediately turned itself on and the pedals began to play *The Old Rugged Cross* while the manuals joined in contrapuntally with a Debussy piano prelude.

"MacTate. Maybe I'm crazy, but how else can you explain it? It's Schweingeweine's tumor. It can't have his temporal lobes any more, so it's taken over the organ."

"But, Ransom —"

"Well, what else could it be? You saw it spill down between the pedals the other day, didn't you? Flugel probably couldn't get it out. And I'm not sure what that preservative —"

"But wouldn't we have heard from Flugel about it before this? He's hardly the sort to be reticent —"

"No." Ransom shook his head. "He probably hasn't been near it since he cleaned it up. He's not an organist, and I think the Dean's wife sort of laid down an unwritten law that it wasn't to be used till the — launching today." He grinned. "I cheated. That one time. I guess that's why Flugel got so excited."

MacTate looked at the organ thoughtfully. "But how would that keep it from playing itself? She didn't seem to exercise much control over —"

"Now that's the funny thing about it." Ransom aimed a finger at him. "I had a feeling it was just learning how to turn itself on for the first time

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today. When I did it. You know." He clicked the power switch off and pointed to it as it clicked itself on again. "See how quick it goes on again now? But after the first piece, it took it a minute or two to figure out how to do it. And didn't it strike you while it was playing that it was sort of feeling its oats? As if it was letting itself go for the first time?"

"Well," MacTate's expression was not quite skeptical, "there was a certain unction — But tell me, old boy, how are you going to break it of turning itself on and playing its own pieces?" He looked around apprehensively. "Is Flugel here today?"

"No." Ransom waved disdainfully. "You couldn't expect a great genius like him to stand listening to an amateur program." He grinned. "But he'll find out what he missed when he comes back." He got off the bench and stuck his handkerchief into his pocket. "Then *he* can worry about breaking it of bad habits. It's the Music Department's property, isn't it?"

"But, Ransom —"

"Come on, MacTate." Ransom headed down the corridor. "It'll serve them both right. Him *and* the organ."

MacTate heard nothing further of the maverick organ until several days later. He was tearing interesting shapes out of the pages of an unrewarding issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics* when his phone rang. Ransom was on the other end demanding his presence at an interview with Flugel. "He's on his way over here to my office. Sounded desperate on the phone. I need you for a witness in case there's a murder."

Flugel was already in Ransom's office when MacTate got there, but no murder had been committed. He was slumped in a chair like a personification of surrender.

He nodded tragically to MacTate and turned back to Ransom. "But, Ransom, I tell you I *know* the thing hates me. I don't know what you did to it, but you've got to undo it. I don't have the temperament for in-fighting like this. I'll do anything you say. I —"

"But I told you, Flugel." Ransom waved his hands demonstratively. "*I* didn't do anything to it. You did. You spilled Schweingeweine's tumor all over it. And that funny preservative it was in — Listen. You don't think —" He paused thoughtfully. "I mean, there's no reason to think that Schweingeweine hates you, is there?"

Flugel looked up indignantly. "Of course not. Why should he? I do all his work for him."

"Well, then, there's no carry-over there." Ransom looked at him. "You say it's trying to drive you crazy."

"Yes. I *know* it is." Flugel squirmed in his chair. "Somehow it's found out the one piece I can't stand. It's an old hymn. *Shall We Gather by the River.*

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Hideous. Goes back to — a childhood experience. But it *knows* I can't stand it, because it plays it over and over, in all keys and all sorts of variations —" Flugel clutched his hair with both hands. "How does it *know* I can't stand it? Unless you told it somehow?"

"But look, Flugel. *I* didn't know that was your — nemesis. The piece, I mean. Did I?" Ransom looked at him for a moment. "Listen. Did Schweingeweine know you couldn't stand it?"

Flugel looked up. "Why, yes. As a matter of fact, he did. But I —"

"Well," Ransom leaned back in his swivel chair and began to swing, "that's it, then. The tumor used to be part of Schweingeweine's brain, so it's familiar with your — neuroses."

"But what I don't understand," Flugel said hopelessly, "is why it should want to drive me crazy. I didn't do anything —"

"Just a moment, Flugel," said MacTate. "When did it begin to play this hymn?"

"Why," Flugel drew a hand across his forehead, "it was about — No. I remember." His eyes lit up. "It was right after I tried to lock it up. The switch, you know. I drilled a hole in it and put a little chain through it, and then screwed a bracket on the edge of the top manual to lock it to. So the thing couldn't turn itself on." He shook his head sadly. "Next morning I found it had stuck one of those little red wires into the keyhole of the lock and burst it open. Then it began to play *Shall We* —" He shuddered.

"Well, if you tried to frustrate it —" Ransom started to grin. But the sight of Flugel's haggard eyes checked him. "Listen," he said, suddenly sympathetic, "why don't you just take out the whole switch mechanism? Then it can't turn itself on. It's not very bright, because it didn't know how to work the switch in the first place. Till I showed it. Maybe after a while it'll wear itself out trying to figure what we did to it, and those red things will be weak enough to —"

"Professor Ransom!" Flugel's eyes shone with gratitude. He got up and clutched his hair emotionally with one hand. "I'm sorry I ever doubted you. I'm glad I didn't think of it myself, because now I'm sure it wasn't you. I'm — I'm sorry. And thanks." He went to the door. "I can't wait to do it. I'll go do it now!" He darted happily out of the room.

MacTate looked at Ransom. "Do you really think it will work?"

"Well —" Ransom shrugged. "It sounds reasonable. Doesn't it?" He swung thoughtfully in his swivel chair for a moment. "Of course I'm not too sure about it wearing itself out. But if it'll make him feel good to think so —"

"But why does he keep going down there if the thing is driving him crazy?" MacTate cocked a puzzled eyebrow.

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"Oh. He told me about that. Schweingeweine has him orchestrating some pieces for the University band and he's scared the old boy will get nasty about it if they're not finished by the time he gets out of the hospital."

"But couldn't he take them home and do them there? Or get a new office?"

"No." Ransom shook his head. "They've got a lot of scores down there he has to use. You know. To steal hot licks from Rimsky-Korsakov and those fellows. Too many of them to move."

"Well, I hope your idea works out all right," MacTate said dubiously. He was far from confident that so simple an operation as taking out the switch would balk the organ's malicious ingenuity for long. He did not agree with Ransom's estimate of its intelligence. All the rest of the day he puzzled over ways of destroying, or at least immobilizing it without damaging the organ itself. It seemed more logical to do something to the tube closet, to which the thing seemed as yet to have no access. Perhaps take out the tubes. At least the idea was worth communicating to Ransom. The next morning he went to his colleague's office.

"Have you heard anything from Flugel?" He sat down, crossed his legs, and lit a cigarette.

Ransom shrugged. "Not a thing. Yet. Why? You worried about him?"

"Well, you know, old boy, after all he is a human being. Aren't you worried about him?"

Ransom leaned his chin in his hand thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, I did sort of feel sorry for him yesterday. But I told him what to do, didn't I? I don't see what else we can do. Short of taking the organ apart and —"

"Well, that's what I wanted to see you about. I thought perhaps if we took all the tubes out —"

Suddenly the door flew open and Flugel darted into the room. His cheeks were bloodless, his hair and eyes aghast.

"Ransom! MacTate! I can't stand it any more. I'm going to quit my job. That thing's trying to kill me!" He clutched his hair with both hands.

"Look, Flugel." Ransom spoke in soothing tones. "You've been under a strain lately. Why don't you sit down and take it easy."

Flugel fidgeted and sat down on the edge of a chair. "But you have to believe me. It's ruthless. It's evil. It's — homicidal!"

Ransom laughed blandly. "Now, Flugel. It can't be as bad as all that. Did you take out the switch, like I told you?"

"Yes, yes." Flugel waved his hands nervously "But it got the wire ends together again. With those red tendrils. And it's —"

"Well, never mind. We'll soon fix that. What's it trying to do? Hypnotize you?"

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"No, no! I wish to God it were. It's trying to find a vibration that will kill me. It tries one frequency at a time, and increases the volume till the bones in your head —"

"All right. Let's go down and take a look at it. Is it still doing it? I mean, does it know you're not there? That you've —"

"I don't know." Flugel wrung his hands. "Before I slipped out, I put on a record of myself playing the piano. Loud, so it would think I was — rather fighting back. But it has an uncanny way of —"

"Well, you better come along, in case it's waiting for you to come back. MacTate has a scheme for —"

"I won't." Flugel sprang to his feet and began to sob hysterically. "I won't go back there! I won't! I tell you it's trying to kill me. You can't make me —"

"Now look, Flugel." Ransom looked him firmly in the eye. "Sit down and stop acting like a big baby. Look. It's pretty hard to actually kill anybody with audible waves. If it wasn't, why wouldn't people go around getting killed by organs every day? You could stand it long enough to —"

"But that's what I mean!" Flugel screamed. "The waves aren't all audible. It's got into the tube closet and it's making frequencies you never —"

"My God!" Ransom looked apprehensively at MacTate. "Let's get down there. It's liable to knock the auditorium down before it gets to Flugel. Come along, Flugel. You can wait outside."

They ran out of the building and over to the auditorium. Flugel hesitated at the top of the basement steps while Ransom and MacTate ran on down.

As they came to the head of the corridor, they heard an immense groan, as if all the organ notes were sounding at once, and then a sickening crack, followed by several splintering crashes.

Pieces of the organ were still sliding from the top of the debris when they rounded the edge of the corridor. Sticking out of the heap like fantastic bristles were the ends of what looked like a tangle of wires. The wires were no longer red but blackish, and the stiff ends began to grow flaccid and fall back among the scattered keys of the organ.

"My God, MacTate! It hit its own vibration first." Ransom kicked a splintered pedal.

"The organ's too, apparently."

"No, no. It just tore the organ apart in its death throes. Go tell Flugel he needn't worry any more about —"

"What have you done, Ransom?" Flugel's pallid face appeared around the edge of the corridor. "Good Lord! Don't tell me you had to use an axe." He advanced cautiously to the edge of the debris. "That noise —"

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"Don't be silly, Flugel. If I could do that with an axe, I'd hire out as a —"

A phone rang down the corridor.

"Sounds like mine," said Flugel. "Wait a minute."

For the first time they became aware of the piano record playing in Flugel's office. They heard him turn it off to answer the phone.

MacTate wiped his forehead with his palm. "Well, what do we do with the remains? This is going to cost someone a lot of money."

Ransom grunted. "They've got insurance on it." He pointed to the tangle of wires. "But we better get the tendrils out before they start to putrify." He stooped over and began to pull at one of them.

"Ransom." Flugel came back into the hall. "It's for you. She couldn't get your office, so she thought you might be practicing down here."

"She?" Ransom looked up suspiciously.

"The Dean's wife. Something about when you're going to give another concert. I didn't —"

"Flugel." Ransom stood up. "Look, Flugel. I helped you out with the tumor, didn't I? Listen, Flugel, tell her I'm not here. Tell her you don't know me. Tell her — MacTate! You talk to her. Tell her — Oh, my God! That's what you get for helping people. If I'd just let it drive Flugel crazy. . . ."

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

THE upsurge in science fiction publishing seems to have leveled off to a plateau. If you want a detailed statistical analysis of the year 1952, simply look up our figures on the year 1951 (F&SF, April 1952); they're still exact almost to the last decimal point.

This means that there seems to be a steady market for around 50 science fiction books a year, about half of them novels and half anthologies and other collections of shorts. The constantly threatened (on paper) "taking over" from the detective story has not materialized; mysteries continue on their course, with about four published to every one science fiction book (though science fiction has slightly better and more persistent sales).

Again, as in 1951, the sharpest contrast with the mystery field lies in the lack of fresh talent in the full-length novel. The number of first mystery novels was a good deal larger than the total of all science fiction novels — and almost all of these were by old hands.

The one place where new talent flourished strongly was in a field which hardly existed last year: the teen-age science fiction story. There were at least seventeen nominally "juvenile" science fiction books published in 1952; and the best of these can hold their own with the year's adult fiction. Whether you're looking for moderately simple stories to introduce your children to this noble field, or simply for some firstrate entertainment for yourself, you should not miss Poul Anderson's VAULT OF THE AGES, Arthur C. Clarke's ISLANDS IN THE SKY, Raymond F. Jones's SON OF THE STARS, Chad Oliver's MISTS OF DAWN (all Winston), Andre Norton's STAR MAN'S SON (Harcourt) or Robert A. Heinlein's THE ROLLING STONES (Scribner's).

The Anderson, Oliver and Norton volumes are all first book-length efforts, and make us look forward eagerly to adult novels from these authors. Mr. Heinlein, who has regrettably neglected his annual volume of the Future History for adults this year, proves once more that he knows how to write pure science fiction, for all audiences, better than any of his contemporaries. To these specimens of juvenile fiction should be added a superlative volume of fact, also commended to adults, BY SPACE SHIP TO THE MOON, by Jack Coggins and Fletcher Pratt (Random).

Another trend somewhat distinguishing 1952 from 1951 was an increase

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in reprints. By now, almost every 25¢ and 35¢ line has published some science fiction; and the better books in the field stand an excellent chance of gaining in this way thousands of new readers (and dollars). Hard cover reissues have been fewer but distinguished. The collector can at last balance his library properly with the welcome return to print of such incomparable imaginative classics as E. R. Eddison's THE WORM OUROBOROS (Dutton), H. Rider Haggard's FIVE ADVENTURE NOVELS (Dover) and H. G. Wells's 28 SCIENCE FICTION STORIES (Dover).

One more trend . . . and an unfortunate one. Books keep getting bigger out of all proportion to their quality; publishers seem to insist on the large economy size package, however much the bulk may pull down the level of readability. Our apologies, therefore, to such novels as Fritz Leiber's CONJURE WIFE and DESTINY TIMES THREE and C. L. Moore's JUDGMENT NIGHT, which would assuredly, as single volumes, have been chosen for our "Best" list of any year, but which appeared in Galactic Emperor-sized books cluttered with lesser matter.

And now on to the books which struck us as the best, in imaginative fiction and fact, of 1952:

Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty, editors: THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1952 (Fell). Despite the enormous increase in the material they must survey, the judgment of these editors remains generally solid and unerring.

L. Sprague de Camp & Willy Ley: LANDS BEYOND (Rinehart). This blithe account of those peoples and kingdoms of marvel so carefully described and mapped by our naïve forebears (and some contemporaries) is a triumph of both scholarship and entertainment.

John W. Campbell, Jr.: CLOAK OF AESIR (Shasta). A collection proving irrefutably that a great editor was also a superlative writer.

Arthur C. Clarke: THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE (Harper). Cogent outline of the facts which will make future history — and itself history-making as a major book club's first recognition of spaceflight.

Arthur C. Clarke: SANDS OF MARS (Gnome). A quiet, convincingly detailed portrayal of a frontier that will come.

Groff Conklin, editor: INVADERS OF EARTH (Vanguard). A veteran anthologist creates a nice pattern of pleasing, if not always brilliant, variations on a classic theme.

Richard Beale Davis, editor: CHIVERS' LIFE OF POE (Dutton). Interesting never-before-printed sidelights on The Master, in a beautifully made limited edition.

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Donald B. Day, editor: INDEX TO THE SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINES 1926–1950 (Perri). A monumental mass of information, indispensable to every collector and serious student of the field.

Martin Gardner: IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE (Putnam). An acute analysis of the pretensions of pseudo-science, as healthy as it is amusing.

Gerald Heard: GABRIEL AND THE CREATURES (Harper). A light-hearted spiritual allegory of serious scientific thought on the meaning of evolution, provocative in its thinking, entrancing in its prose.

Robert A. Heinlein, editor: TOMORROW, THE STARS (Doubleday). A fine anthology, unusual in that the introduction, a pleasant, unassuming discussion of the nature of science fiction, ranks with the best of its stories.

Franz Kafka: SELECTED STORIES (Modern Library). A controversial matter of taste — but you may well find this imaginative fiction of extraordinary power and subtlety.

Walt Kelly: I GO POGO (Simon & Schuster). As soon as travel between alternate universes is practicable, we shall at once shift our existences to the swampland where Pogo, Churchy, Albert *et al.* rigidly enforce a sensible code of happy madness.

Cyril M. Kornbluth: TAKEOFF (Doubleday). Told against a background of malice domestic and foreign, Kornbluth's first novel is a plausible and exciting compound of rocketry, espionage and murder.

Judith Merril, editor: BEYOND HUMAN KEN (Random). An imaginative editor unearths a fine lot of charming, sympathetic stories about odd varieties of sentience.

Lewis Padgett: ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS (Gnome). These hilarious chronicles of the drunken Gallegher who plays science by ear are much needed relief for those of us weary of reading about "people being awed by things."

Frederik Pohl, editor: BEYOND THE END OF TIME (Permabooks). Not only fine reading entertainment but a solid punch in the nose for inflation.

Cornelius Ryan, editor: ACROSS THE SPACE FRONTIER (Viking). An expansion of *Collier's* celebrated symposium on spaceflight and satellite stations, authoritatively written and beautifully illustrated.

Clifford D. Simak: CITY (Gnome). Those wondrous stories of the dogs who inherited the earth have been skilfully woven into a solid book by the interpolated commentary of a Dog editor of the infinitely remote future. We predict this will stand as a classic of imaginative literature.

Francis Stevens: THE HEADS OF CERBERUS (Polaris). Written in 1919, this

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period piece is still eminently readable; and its first book-publication is, despite the clumsy illustrations, an impressive job of bookmaking that is certain to become a collector's item.

Wilson Tucker: THE LONG LOUD SILENCE (Rinehart). One of the most individual writers in the field traces a heel's rough path to survival in a devastated United States.

A. E. van Vogt: AWAY AND BEYOND and DESTINATION: UNIVERSE! (Pellegrini & Cudahy). Two highly welcome collections covering most of van Vogt's best short work.

A. E. van Vogt: THE WEAPON MAKERS (Greenberg). If this is not remotely *science* fiction, still it is one of the all-time greats of imaginative melodrama.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: PLAYER PIANO (Scribner's). Human, satirical and exciting, this is by far the most successful of the recent attempts to graft science fiction onto the serious "straight" novel.

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Both of your editors are strong cat men; and no less than four cats, of various ages and breeds, function as editorial assistants on F&SF and furnish us with inestimably consoling companionship during the long night vigils over manuscripts. This makes us peculiarly susceptible to the horror of such a sinister purpose as that to which cats are put in this story; but even the reader who can take cats or leave them alone will, we think, find a chill neatness in this Canadian author's blend of light style and grisly subject matter.

The Cat Was Black

by TOM BROWNE

"WHAT ARE YOU doing with that cat?"

The man said nothing, just gazed at me silently with luminous eyes.

The cat was black, and the man was black in the gloom of the narrow alley. But I had just seen him pick the animal up from where it had been nibbling bits of food that had spilled from an over-full garbage pail.

He held the cat in his arms, stroking it. The cat's eyes gleamed. I saw them droop and close to mere yellow slits in ecstatic enjoyment of the man's gentle hand on his neck and spine.

The man turned, hurried down the alley, feet clicking on the granite paving. I followed, quickening my step until I came up beside him. In the pale glow of a night light burning at a rear entrance I took a good look at him.

He was dressed in a dark suit, and did not look unusual — not a bit like some of the characters I have met in lanes. His face was round, pinkish, cherubic. His complexion was blondish, and although I couldn't see his eyes, I imagined they'd be blue.

I spoke. "That's a nice cat. Are you taking him home?"

He halted in the dull glimmer of the little electric bulb, peered at me silently. I could see that he wore rimless glasses. The glasses sparkled, and I thought that was what had caused his eyes to shine when I had first spoken.

"Do you like cats?" he asked very softly. "Black cats?"

"Not particularly; not more than other cats."

"Oh, I prefer black cats," he said. "But it seems that black cats are becoming more scarce, so scarce that I am concerned lest they become extinct. Indeed I am."

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"Black cats become extinct? Oh, I hardly think so."

"But there are more gray ones, and mottled ones; even more white ones and yellow ones than there are black cats."

I had never taken particular notice before. "Perhaps," I agreed. "But I see you take a great deal of interest in cats."

He gazed on me intently. "I do indeed. I am always on the lookout for cats — that is, black ones. Every evening I tramp these lanes seeking some poor homeless cat such as this." He showed me the cat drowsing languidly in his arms, purring softly. "Isn't he a splendid specimen?"

"Yes, he's a very nice cat. I suppose you have quite a collection of them?"

"No-o-o. You see, my friend, they don't last. Black cats, as I just pointed out, are very scarce." He was pensive for a while. I could see his eyes were blue — a very mild, studious blue. "Yes, very scarce."

"Are they, really?"

"Oh yes. They are. Are you — ah — interested in cats, by any chance?"

"I am studying sociology."

"Ah! Of course then, you know something about cats. Why, in your opinion, are there so few black cats?"

"Couldn't say, I'm sure. But there never was a preponderance of black cats, was there?"

"Much more abundant than now, my friend. I should know, for all last week I was able to find only one black cat. And this is the first I have picked up this week. But he is a beautiful specimen, isn't he? So round and plump, his fur so silky and soft — not scrawny like some. But perhaps he has been well taken care of. Perhaps he is some little child's pet. See how gentle he is! Oh, I do hope he is not some little child's pet!"

"Not likely; he's just an alley cat."

"Oh no!" He stroked the animal gently, spoke more to it than to me. "No, he's not just an alley cat. Definitely not! He's too well fed and cared for. He's a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed."

I noted an exuberant, gloating pitch to his voice — like someone who had quite unexpectedly come into possession of something long yearned for — and it caused me to wonder a little. I said:

"Oh, I don't see that that cat should be more valuable than any other cat. I should say he's just an ordinary cat — an alley cat."

The man fixed me with an intent, pitying stare. "I thought," he said, "you would know something about cats. I see you know nothing whatever. And I was hoping you would understand; but I observe that you do not. Goodnight, my friend."

"But just a moment," I said hastily as he started to go. "What you say is true. I know nothing about cats."

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He hesitated. "But you are interested?" he asked hopefully.

"Very interested."

"To help you in your studies?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell me then, why is it that opposite attracts opposite? A big person likes a little person, a dark girl a fair boy, and so on. Perhaps you have noted that I am very light-complexioned, have you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, that is why — because I am light-complexioned — I must have black cats."

"I see," I said. "I am a dark type, so I should like white or gray cats. Is that so?"

"Precisely! You know, of course, that the cat is a carnivorous animal of the *felidae* family?"

I nodded. "Yes, that's right."

"And this" — he indicated the cat in his arms — "is the domesticated species, *felis domestica*."

"Yes, that's right," I agreed.

He nodded approval, and I saw his eyes gleam. Or perhaps it was the light glinting on his glasses.

"And," he continued, "any member of the *felidae* family, as perhaps you have heard, has nine lives."

"Yes, I've heard so, but it's not true, is it?"

"Not true! Why, of course it's true!"

He seemed to brood for a time, then said, "If I didn't like you, young man, I shouldn't be wasting time telling you this. But would you like to live nine times?"

"Of course — if that were possible."

"Possible! Why, certainly it's possible!" The tone of his voice showed irritability. "But if you scoff, what is the use of telling you a secret that will give you life after life, that will permit you to live for perhaps 700 years?"

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "It's not that I meant to scoff. Really, I'm intensely interested. It's only that I'm ignorant about such things."

"Exactly! Well, you are young, and being young is an excellent excuse. I forgive you, for I understand. But I should like to see you live for 700 years. Already I have lived five times. Do you believe that?"

"Yes," I lied. "Of course I do."

"I knew you would! You see, I can tell. You are the same type as I. How do I know? I know because you love to prowl these lonely lanes. They are peaceful, aren't they?"

"Yes. And very dark too."

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"No, not dark. You will be able to see very well, I assure you. I remember — in my other lives, of course — when there were no lights at all. I have seen great cities grow up from the wilderness. I have seen wars come and go. As a matter of fact, I fought in the War of 1812. That was in one of my other lives. And I was in the first World War. I was killed in that war."

"Were you?"

"Oh yes!" He smiled reminiscently. "But then — you are not interested in all that. You wouldn't be interested in all my other lives, of course. Now, as I was saying a moment before, I like you. I've taken quite a fancy to you, in fact. But if I tell you the secret of existence after existence, you must promise to obey my instructions in one regard, and that implicitly. Do you promise?"

"I promise."

"Well, it is this: you must leave all black cats for me. There is an abundance of white cats, and gray cats, and mottled cats. You may have as many of these as you wish. But you promise to leave all the black cats for me, don't you? You see, I still have four more lives to live and if there were no black cats . . ."

His eyes closed in deep thought, as if he were considering the wisdom of going further with revealing his secret. He remained silent until I spoke.

"Yes, I promise you shall have all the black cats."

"Very well then. I shall continue — and I must do so quickly — already I have little time, for you see I have not fared well of late. I am famished, so I must hurry home. I shall tell you now the secret of attaining life after life. Eat no other meat but cat."

"Cat!"

"Ah, now do not be alarmed. Do as I say! There is nothing wrong with cat meat. You eat pig meat, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is nothing wrong with cat meat, either. *Felis domestica* has become endeared to man as a household pet. Yet a cow is a pet — and a very useful one, too — and a lamb. Have you ever seen a fleecy, beautiful lamb? Yet people eat cows and lambs, do they not?"

"Yes they do. That's very true."

"Of course! Everything I tell you is true. You must remember that I have lived five lifetimes — 337 years to be exact. And I've always eaten cats."

"But I don't imagine they'd taste very good," I protested.

"Delicious, simply delicious." His mouth filled with saliva because of the hunger that was gnawing him. But he swallowed it back and continued quickly. "There is one thing I must impress upon you. You are dark-com-

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plexioned, so you must eat only the flesh of light-colored cats, and you will live nine times and we can perhaps be friends for many lifetimes."

He lost himself in deep thought for a time, then sighed. "Only four more lifetimes — for me. But you — you are young in this old world, and you have hundreds of years before you. Well, I must get home with my cat. Ah, but he is a lovely specimen."

"May I go with you?"

He studied me thoughtfully. "Of course," he said suddenly. "Of course you may. Come quickly then, for I am very hungry."

We came out of the lane-mouth, hurried diagonally across the street to where his luxurious car was parked.

In twenty minutes we were on the other side of town, in a fine residential area. Maples lined the streets.

We wheeled up in front of a stately old house with wide steps and a spacious porch.

My friend wiggled from under the steering wheel, gently pressing his arm against the folds of his coat which formed a dark warm pocket for the cat. He bounded lightly up the steps and rang the bell.

Presently the door was opened by a tall thin woman with a parched dry face and sad sickly eyes.

"By the way," he said as we entered the house. "I don't believe I know your name."

"Scanlon — Arthur Scanlon."

"Have I told you who I am?"

"No, you haven't."

"Stupid of me, I'm sure. I'm Maurice Martineau."

"Not the insurance executive?"

"Yes, indeed." He placed his hand on my shoulder. "But remember, my boy, I was not always wealthy. In fact I started as a poor, half-starved newsboy. But goodness gracious! Here, Maddie, I've completely forgotten my cat."

He removed the animal from his coat with some difficulty, for the cat was loathe to leave his warm bed and hung tenaciously with distended claws. After considerable pulling, he managed to free it, and turned it over to Maddie with a long, silent look.

She hurried to the rear of the gloomy house.

Martineau took my arm, led me to his studio. "Please be seated, Arthur," he said, motioning me to a big, old-fashioned leather-backed chair. "I neglected to tell my housekeeper you would be staying. You will dine with me, of course?"

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"Well, no . . ."

"Come, come Arthur! Surely you will have something. I shall tell Maddie immediately."

"Well, no . . . You see, I ate earlier, and I'm not a hearty eater at any time, really."

Martineau's deep eyes smiled behind his glasses. He wagged an immaculate pink finger at me.

"Coffee then, Arthur," he said. "We shall settle for coffee. I really believe you thought I would give you some of my cat."

"Oh no."

"You did, I am sure. However, I couldn't afford to do that! Please excuse me while I tell Maddie you are staying for coffee."

Waiting for his return, I studied the room. A low, shaded light was burning. It gave a soft glow that was neither warm, nor yet gloomy. A coal fire in the grate had died to rich comfortable red embers. The dim light against the walls revealed a wealth of books.

My strange friend must certainly be a man of substance, I mused, filling my pipe. I lit it and flung the match into the fireplace on my way across the room to browse among the volumes.

I glanced over the titles. They were mostly scientific. One, *History of the Felidae Family*, caught my attention. I pulled it from the case, opened the fly leaf. It was snatched abruptly from my hand. I was startled to see Martineau, his eyes fixed on me like burning fire. He was quite angry.

"I — I didn't hear you come in," I said. "You walk as silently as a cat."

He closed the book with a snap, held it in one hand and drummed it on the finger-tips of the other.

"Arthur," he said evenly. "Please do not be impertinent. I do not permit anyone to touch my books. Some are irreplaceable, absolutely irreplaceable."

"I'm sorry; but I didn't think you'd care."

"But I do care."

He carefully replaced the volume. "It will soon be time to dine. Shall we have it served in my study?"

"As you wish."

"I think it will be more cosy here. Maddie will serve it here."

I resumed my seat in the big comfortable chair. Martineau sat opposite in a similar chair, and we both remained silent for a time.

I studied my companion in the dim light. His eyes were peculiarly brilliant and shone with a yellowish phosphorescent glow.

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Presently Maddie brought in our food on a serving tray. She deftly placed the repast on a coffee table. I remember distinctly the tinkle of the silver on its mirrored surface.

Martineau rubbed the palms of his hands together joyfully.

"Thank you, Maddie," he said, dragging his chair forward. "That's right — coffee for my friend. Now, that's just fine, Maddie, just fine. You are a jewel, Maddie, a real jewel. Come, Arthur! Pull your chair close."

Maddie smiled wanly and drifted silently from the room. We were alone.

I sipped my coffee slowly. Martineau's delicate nostrils dilated slightly at the aroma wafted from the hot viands. He fell to eating as if he were famished.

On his plate were golden carrots, potatoes white as new snow, and meat broiled deliciously brown. The pieces resembled the drum-sticks of chicken, only there was much less flesh on them.

Martineau picked up a leg daintily in his fingers, munched contentedly.

He stripped the flesh from it rapidly with his teeth, leaned an elbow on the table, and waggled the bare bone at me. "Arthur," he said, "this is cat meat. Black cat meat. Delicious black cat meat." He nodded his head sagely. "Of course, it would not benefit you — not unless you ate gray cats, or white cats, or mottled cats. Understand?"

"I think I do."

"It will last me two meals, that is all. Oh, I tell you, Arthur, I have a difficult time securing enough cats to keep me going."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"However," he continued, picking up another piece, "I have managed. I have always managed somehow."

Then he fell silent, savoring of all the food. When he had devoured the meal, he wiped his mouth with a napkin, drank his coffee, consuming two bread rolls with it, and leaned back contentedly. He studied me with his glowing eyes.

"I do not know why I have taken a liking to you, Arthur. I really do not. I presume, however, that my feeling is reciprocated. Is it?"

"Certainly."

"I wish I were as young again as you."

"Or I as old as you," I said graciously. "And as wise."

He seemed very pleased. I am sure I heard him almost purring.

"Well," he said. "A full stomach brings contentment. I feel sorry for poor devils who are always hungry. I know what it feels like to be hungry. Remember I started as a poor newsboy, with lots of competition from larger boys too." He leaned toward me. "You will let me have all the black cats you happen to run across, won't you, Arthur?"

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"Of course I shall — all that I run across."

"Good! Good! It will be much easier — very much easier. Two hunters are much better than one. How do you feel tonight, Arthur?"

"Excellent. I feel excellent."

"Well then!" he said eagerly. "Shall we hunt tonight for cats? You can have all the white ones, and gray ones, and mottled ones — but please let me have all the black ones, Arthur."

"But isn't it rather late?"

"Late! It is never too late, Arthur. We must do this under the mantle of darkness, you know." He glanced at his watch. "It lacks only a little of midnight," he said. "Come, let us leave immediately. After midnight is the best time for cats — they are more numerous after midnight."

We had not gone many blocks before a light rain started falling. I noticed it on the windshield.

"We shall go to the Kerrisdale district," Martineau said. "I haven't been there for — let me see now — seven weeks. I think there should be cats there."

"I really couldn't say."

"I think we shall do very well there. I shall park at Thirty-third. You shall go east, and I west, up all the lanes for five blocks as far as Thirty-eight. Do you know how to catch cats, Arthur?"

"I think I shall manage."

"I shall tell you! In the back compartment, I have calves' liver. They like liver, you know. Well, whenever you see a cat's eyes shining in the dark, walk very slowly toward it, with the piece of liver in your hand. Do not move quickly, I warn you. Say softly, 'Here kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty! Here kitty, kitty, kitty!' When he comes to take the liver, keep it in your outstretched hand, and permit him to nibble it. Then gently run your other hand down over his neck. Tighten your fingers on the nape of his neck, then slip him quickly into the white flour sack I shall give you. The white sack does not attract attention should you meet passersby."

"What if I should be stopped — perhaps by the owner?"

He laughed softly. "You shall not be stopped, Arthur. People permit their cats to wander at will through the night. And no one is abroad. If, however, you should meet anyone curious enough to demand what you have in the bag, you can always say you are taking your cat out to lose it."

"That sounds plausible enough. But do people do that, actually?"

"Oh yes. They abandon them at will — poor creatures. A thoroughly reprehensible action — but there is no law against it. Actually we are doing a great kindness, in many cases. Oh, you shall soon learn how to hunt cats,

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Arthur! You scarcely realize how fortunate you are meeting me. You are the first — the very first — to whom I have divulged my secret. You shall live nine lives, Arthur. Think of it — nine long, happy lives."

I sat comfortably back into the soft cushion, listened to the swish of the windshield swipes as we sped through the wet, dark streets. Martineau was a deft driver. He swung the car expertly around corners, until we came to a straight road. I saw the wet pavement shining ahead. He speeded up.

I glanced down at the speedometer under its soft light on the dashboard. Forty. Forty-five. Fifty.

"We must hurry, Arthur," Martineau said. "The night is far too short for hunting. But do not worry. I am a prudent driver."

Then I sensed him moving quickly, heard the screech of tires, felt the car lurch horribly, and there was a crash.

I was hurled violently. I remember distinctly picking myself up from a lawn. Lights began to blaze in nearby houses and people came running out.

The car was a grotesque mass of twisted wreckage. It was lodged against a huge tree on the boulevard. I perceived at a glance what happened. Martineau, in attempting to avoid a car at the intersection, had skidded and crashed across the curb into the tree.

I surveyed the wreckage. It was horrible, seeing my friend, limp and broken, behind the steering wheel. My heart was pounding, and I was suffering shock from the accident. I wept for him silently.

But I refused to get into the ambulance. After begging the attendant to tell me if he were dead, and being assured that he was, I slipped away with the crowd of spectators so the police would not question me.

I hurried to Martineau's home. Maddie answered the door when I rang.

"I know he can't be home," I told her agitatedly. "For he's been killed in an accident."

Her dark eyes filled with sadness.

"You will find him if you search long enough and far enough," she said. "For you are very young yet. I shall perhaps never see him again."

She closed the door softly, weeping.

I left and walked slowly down the dreary rain-swept street.

This was long ago. But I have been searching the lanes constantly. Tonight, finally, a strange thing happened. I saw a ragged newsboy with a black cat cuddled in his arms. I could see the animal's eyes shining from way off. I hurried after him, but he disappeared down the alley.

I know my eyes could not have deceived me. But then it was quite black in the alley, and the boy was dressed in dark clothes, and the cat was black.

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In seven previous stories in F&SF, the versatile Miss Seabright has evoked almost every type of emotional mood, from the poignantly touching to the outrageously funny. Now she creates a mood rare in science fiction: an evocation of the sheerly horrible . . . or even, in the strongest sense of the word, horrid. Her Venusian explorer is hardly an attractive character; but his fate, deserved though it may be, is something that might shock the most practiced sadist.

Thirsty God

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

BRIAN WAS RIDING HARD when he reached the sanctuary at twilight. He had foundered two mounts under him since yesterday, and for all his haste the Hrothy, howling like a pack of dervishes, were close behind him. He rose in the stirrups and looked back anxiously.

Yes, in 40 seconds or so Megath's relatives would be within bowshot. When they caught him they would, he knew, hang him up by the heels and shoot at him with blunted arrows for two or three days before letting him die. He shuddered. The opening of the shrine was dark and uninviting, but he was almost certain that the Hrothy would respect its sacred character; and the sanctuary looked, to his inexperience, like any other of the shrines that dotted the surface of the second planet. It was a piece of extreme luck that he had found it. He jumped from the back of his rox and plunged into it.

The Hrothy got up to the winded rox about 50 seconds later. It was plain enough where Brian was. They looked at each other in silence. Megath's uncle, who had been the hottest in pursuit of any of the Hrothy, gave a short laugh. Man after man began to dismount without speaking.

The Hrothy considered that Brian, in first violating and then deserting Megath, had committed an unforgivable sin. (It was not so much his taking her violently as his subsequent tiring of her that they objected to. They objected to it profoundly. It went against all their mores. They liked their violations to stick.) But they thought, from stories they had heard and from experience, that if Brian stayed inside the square stone shrine for the next twelve hours, their grudge against him would be satisfied. Megath

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would be avenged. Silently the tribesmen seated themselves in a semicircle outside the entrance of the shrine.

Brian, peering from within the opening, was both puzzled and relieved. He had been afraid they would light some of the damp blue river grass and try to smoke him out. All that fuss over a woman whose skin was definitely, if faintly, purple! But apparently they were counting on starvation. He patted the bottles of food-tablets in his pockets and grinned. He had a flask, too. They'd have a long wait, a good long wait.

Their continued silence — the Hrothy were usually noisily emotional — bothered him. He peeked at them doubtfully once more. But apparently they were going to respect the shrine's sanctity; there was nothing to worry about.

He stumbled back a few paces into the shrine's interior. It was quite dark. The floor seemed to be made of slick mud. (Actually, it was an exceedingly durable moisture-resistant plastic, but Brian couldn't know that.) He hesitated, and then lay down on it. He'd had an exhausting day.

He meant to stay awake, on guard, but his fatigue was overpowering. Inside ten minutes he was fast asleep.

As soon as his smoother breathing gave the signal, the scanning rays went to work on him. His pulse was taken, his respiration timed, his oxygen consumption checked. A tiny pad slipped into his damp armpit and came out with perspiration to be analyzed. When he began to snore another tiny pad slipped momentarily into his open mouth. And when he was quite, quite thoroughly asleep, a minute needle drew a drop of blood from his flaccid earlobe. A highly refined technique of zone electrophoresis was exercised on the sample.

The night was well advanced when the scanners completed their diagnosis. In many ways, Brian puzzled them. Physiologically, he was far from what they were used to. But he lay, though just barely, within the range of permissible variation. The mechanism of the scanners had become a little worn. After an almost human pause, the conditioning installations in the shrine went to work on him.

The Hrothy, outside in the cloudy night, waited in wolfish silence. It was not the sacred character of the shrine they were respecting, it was its competence as a factory.

Brian woke at last. He had an impression that much time had passed, and while this was not true chronologically, it was quite accurate physiologically: a lot had happened to him while he was asleep.

The idea of much elapsed time alarmed him. What had the Hrothy been doing while he was unconscious? Still dazed with sleep, he hurried to the opening of the shrine and peered out.

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The tribesmen were seated as he had last seen them, squatting in a semicircle in the light drizzle outside the shrine, with their brightly colored cloaks wrapped tightly around them. They must be intending to wait until hunger drove him out. Brian gave a derisive snort and turned back to the interior of the sanctuary. As he pivoted about he struck his head painfully and unexpectedly on the stone lintel of the shrine opening.

For a moment physical distress obscured the meaning of what had happened. He stood blinking tears of pain from his eyes and cursing softly to himself. Then the significance of the incident came to him suddenly. He had bumped his head on the door lintel. But last night the lintel had been two or three feet *above* the top of his head.

He looked up. His thick black oily hair was brushing against the ceiling. What the hell — what had happened to him? Had the building somehow shrunk? Or had he grown, was he somehow bigger than he had been last night?

For a moment he wondered whether he had caught some fever. Venus abounded in them, and hallucinatory ideas about bodily size characterized one or two of them. And he was thirsty, he felt oddly hot.

He looked down at his hands. His cuffs were only an inch or two below his elbows. Unless he was having a remarkably consistent hallucination . . . It couldn't be a fever; he didn't feel feverish at all, only thirsty and hot. Anyhow, he'd had shots for all the endemic Venusian diseases before he'd left Dindymene. He'd gotten bigger during the night, that was all.

Oddly, the idea did not alarm him. He was rather pleased with it. For a moment he thought of stepping boldly out of the shrine and spreading some havoc among the squatting Hrothy. He'd teach them to annoy a man who was eight — no, more nearly nine feet tall. But there were twenty of them, and they had lots of arrows. He'd better not.

Besides, he was feeling somnolent and lethargic, not at all combative. He couldn't imagine what had happened to him, but it didn't seem to matter. He decided to sit down on the floor and have a drink of water from his flask.

The silvery container was dwarfed in his big new hands. He tipped the flask up to get the last drops, and then tossed it from him petulantly. It was water, all right, but he didn't want water. What he wanted was something more dense.

He crossed his legs under him and leaned back against the slick wall. He closed his eyes; he thought it would help him to think better. In a little while he was asleep.

This time it was late afternoon when he awoke. It was raining hard.

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Without moving from his sitting position, he peered out of the sanctuary, noting absently as he did so that his back seemed somewhat stiff.

The Hrothy were gone. There wasn't a sign of them in the damp landscape, not even a used beetla stick or a clot of rox dung. It was probably a trap; they must be lurking in the neighborhood. Or they might have gone back to the village for reinforcements. Brian grinned. He didn't think he'd be fooled easily. He decided to get up.

He tried to move: nothing happened. Well, he had been in a cramped position for a long time. His legs must have gone to sleep.

Once more he gave his body the order. Once more nothing happened. Brian licked his lips nervously. Was he paralyzed? What was the matter with him? He began to be really frightened. It was at this point that a plunp came in.

Now, the plunp are the oddest of the native peoples of Venus. Some workers who have studied them insist that their material backwardness hides a singularly rich and varied spiritual life. Other ethnologists deny this passionately and say that their pointless, rambling creation legends and inept totem poles show that their spiritual life is just about what you'd expect.

Be that as it may, the plunp are not prepossessing. They have exceedingly slick grayish skins, long shallow jaws with ferocious teeth, and fierce yellow eyes. They wear no clothing, not even a pubic leaf. They smell a little like frogs.

This one came into the sanctuary and stopped in front of Brian. He made a sketchy gesture with one hand; it might have been meant as a respectful salutation or, more informally, been simply his way of saying "Hi!" He looked at Brian calculatingly and then nodded. He opened the hollowed-out areda nut that depended from a length of vine around his neck.

Brian watched. There wasn't much else he could do, and the plunp's coming seemed somehow significant. He watched the creature with fascinated repulsion (the plunp are *not* prepossessing) while it took a hunk of yellowish ointment out of the nut and smeared the stuff over itself. Then the plunp began to rotate slowly in front of Brian, its twiggy, slick-skinned arms outstretched expectantly.

Almost as soon as the yellow goo touched the plunp's glabrous skin, Brian felt an extraordinary excitement in himself. It had the intensity of a sexual urge, but there was emphatically nothing sexual in its fleshless, cold imperative. It was as if all the myriad cells of his body were thirsty, thirsty as individuals, for the yellow ointment and the moisture in the plunp's slick skin under it. The water in Brian's flask hadn't been dense enough to satisfy his thirst; this moisture would.

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He felt a kind of aura, a projection of himself, reach out. It was not a matter of conscious will; even as he made the immaterial contact with the plunp, he resented it. He was thirsty, yes, but it seemed to him that in dehydrating the plunp he was performing an intimate service, submitting to an odious familiarity, with a creature that revolted him unspeakably. A close contact, no matter how impalpable, with a *plunp* . . . ! It made him hate himself. But he couldn't help himself.

(The parallelism between this compulsion and that which he had inflicted on Megrath escaped him. Even if he had thought of it, he would not have been edified. He was not a man who edified easily.)

The plump continued to revolve in front of him, turning first one side and then the other toward the intoxicating dryness it felt emanating from him. It came to Brian that its attitude was that of a worshiper toward a good, serviceable god. Its yellow eyes were closed; its slick skin seemed to be becoming more wrinkled and slack from moment to moment as the dehydration of its tissues continued. Its narrow face wore an expression of repulsive bliss. If he could have moved, Brian felt sure he would have vomited.

Oh, odious. An odious service performed for an odious being. And it felt, somehow, self-destructive, for all Brian's need of moisture. It felt as if Brian, in his new body, had not been quite designed for it. In the contact with the plunp, he was like a plant which, in default of sulphur in its soil, must perforce absorb selenium. He felt almost as if he were poisoning himself.

In this supposition Brian was quite right. The shrine was not really a shrine; in the first instance, it had been a factory. It had been originally designed by biologists of the fourth planet to help their colonists on the second planet adjust to the (for them) overwhelmingly damp environment of Venus.

There are two possible ways of dealing with dampness. One is to be water-*proof*, as are a duck's well-oiled feathers. The Martians tried this and disliked it. They sweltered miserably in the damp heat of their own impervious bodies. So they adopted the second course, which is to enjoy water, to be water *craving*, as is a frog. This solution meant far greater physiological adaptions than had the first one, but the Martians were more satisfied with it.

After they were adapted, they were continually sucking in water through their pores from their damp surroundings, using it in their metabolism, and exhaling dry air out again. There was some degree of selectivity in the process. They could choose which of several objects they wanted to draw water from. It worked fine for the Martians, though in the dry season they were uncomfortable, and when they went home for vacations they were

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miserable. But Brian hadn't been a Martian to begin with, and the scanners had become a little deranged in the long eons that had passed since there had last been Martians on Venus. It was different with him.

To the plunp, he was a delightfully hygroscopic god. To himself, he was a man afflicted with a peculiarly horrid curse.

The plunp went away at last, its skin hanging in lank folds. It staggered a little as it went over the threshold, as if it were drunk. It had left the empty areda nut behind it. Brian watched it weaving away through the pouring sheets of rain.

He couldn't move; he couldn't even wriggle. His back had grown completely stiff. He wasn't sure how he was breathing. But he was sure of one thing: he wasn't going to draw water from a plunp again.

If he got thirsty again, how could he help it? He didn't know, but ignorance had no effect on his determination. As he sat immobile, watching the rain turning to chilly darkness, he felt a tiny surge of hope. What had happened to him was impossible. It just couldn't be. So it couldn't go on forever. Sooner or later, somebody would find him. A plant collector, a man doing a government survey — somebody. All he had to do was to stay alive until then.

It rained pouringly all next day. Brian remembered having heard that in this part of Venus the rainfall could, during the rainy season, exceed 30 inches in twenty-four hours.

About noon on the day after that four plunp came. Brian had been able to satisfy a little of his tormenting thirst from the moisture in the air, and he had laid his plans. As the plunp, anointed with yellow ointment, pirouetted in front of him, he drew into himself. It was like being deaf to a barrage of thunder, like refusing to see a blinding light. He didn't know how he was doing it. But he was.

The punp slithered to a stop. They looked at each other wordlessly and began to wave their twiggy hands. Brian felt a flash of triumph; he'd beaten the hateld, wretched creatures. He felt even more triumphant when, after another silent round robin, they went out.

They came back in a moment, carrying a sharp cornered wooden chest. (The plunp were not clever enough to make such a thing themselves — they had traded for it with the more civilized Orths.) They opened it. Inside there was a drippy, clinging, gelatinous reddish paste. The plunp had had some prior experience with recalcitrant gods.

The plunp whose skin was grayest wound a gob of the paste on the end of a stick. Rather cautiously he held it out toward Brian. He waved it back and forth across his chest and under the end of his nose.

The result, for Brian, was catastrophic. He felt as if he were being turned

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inside out. With wild, forced, hateful speed he began to dehydrate the plunp with the grayest skin. It was like falling endlessly down the black face of a vertical cliff, and getting sicker all the time.

The plunp left at last, when it was nearly dark. They were doing little dance steps and making histrionic gestures with their stick-like arms. They waved their hands in salutation to Brian as they went.

He watched them frozenly. He could not even tremble. The moisture he had taken perforce from them had bloated him by a third; he was distended too with rage and helplessness. This time it had been ten — a hundred times worse than at first. After this he'd accept his degradation docilely. Anything was better than having them force him as they had today.

He sat through the night in a trance of glassy horror. At times he was no longer sure who Brian was. He only knew that Brian had endured something he should not have endured. Someone had learned a dreadful secret about Brian. Numbly he waited for day.

That day it rained less, and only one plunp came. The god who had been Brian thought, "I can stand it if it's only one of them. Yesterday was so much worse."

But the day after there were five and then two and then three. It went on day after day, with more plunp as the season advanced and the rain grew heavier. Day after day. The Hrothy would have been more than satisfied.

Brian hated his glassy-eyed worshipers with a fury that was at first murderous and then became turned inward. If he could have moved, could have done anything at all except loathsomely dehydrate the plunp, he would have killed himself. He would dwell with black self-hatred on the intricate details of his self-destruction. Whether it should be by knives, or fire, or corrosive poisons, he could not decide. He wanted the one that would hurt most.

From one point of view, his ingenious preoccupation with the minutiae of his destruction was a blessing. It kept him from suffering anxiety or apprehension as his advancing physical degeneration became evident. His masochism was genuine; each new evidence of failure — patchy vision, auditory failure, permanent bloat — he greeted with delight. He might even have come to welcome the moisture-drawing service the plunp required of him, since it was the primary cause of his breaking up. That, however, remained beyond him. The violence to his ego was too great.

Time passed. Rain rained. Sometimes as many as twenty plunp stood in the shrine before him, revolving drunkenly, their faces blank. Then, as the days grew longer, the rain began to abate. There was one clear day and then another and then two in a row. The dry summer was setting in.

Worshipers began to come less frequently. When they did, they did not

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stay long. The gradual drying out of the plunp's slick tissues by the heat of summer did not intoxicate them; it made them sleepy. They were no longer interested in gods and hygroscopy and yellow goo. They were, in fact, beginning to estivate.

Brian at first did not dare to believe in it. But when nearly a week had passed without a single plunp presenting itself for him to dehydrate, he let himself be invaded by a most passionate relief. There were no more demands. The days grew longer and brighter. And there were no more plunp.

Then, as the air grew progressively dryer, Brian found that he was beginning to shrink.

He was not alarmed, he was puzzled. He still sat immobile in his corner, his legs crossed under him, but each day he was smaller, lighter, dryer, than he had been the day before. He passed the point of normal physical size where he had been before the mechanism of the shrine had changed him, and receded from it. His bloated skin was shriveling dustily on him. Still he shrank.

He was not alarmed. His puzzlement was a vague and not alarming emotion. And as time passed there were long blank spaces, stretches of faintly voluptuous blackness, in his thoughts.

It came to him slowly that this creeping blackness, this increasingly welcome annihilation of mentality, meant death. Death? Not the agonizing destructions he had pantingly planned for himself, but something better. He rejoiced in it. But — he still had faint curiosities — but why?

Well, he supposed, even gods don't live forever, and he had done an incredible amount of dehydration for the plunp. He had worn himself out with it, and the dry season had finished him. Next year the plunp — for the first time since his agony had begun he felt like laughing — next year the plunp would have to find another god.

At last he sat in his corner shrunken no bigger than a doll. He no longer heard or saw or felt. His mind had stopped. He had shriveled up to nothing; his arms and legs were as small as darning balls. There was no more Brian. If he had had a spark of ego left to make the statement, he would have said that he was dead.

But the plunp were in no immediate danger of losing their deity. When the rainy season came, Brian would wake up again. Once more he would resume his loathesome service for them.

Like worshiper, like god. Brian had years more of hygroscopic action for the plunp before him. But now it was summer. Synchronous with the cycle of his worshipers, the god of the plunp was estivating too.

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The British magazine Lilliput *admirably lives up to its name by presenting stories and articles miniature in size but perfectly formed. It is thanks to one of our favorite contributors, that loyal* Lilliput*-reader Alan Nelson, that we present the first American appearance of one of the neatest and most madly logical of these miniatures.*

The Wheelbarrow Boy

by RICHARD PARKER

"Now SEE HERE, Thomis," I said. "I've just about had enough of you. If you haven't settled yourself down and started some work in two minutes' time I shall turn you into a wheelbarrow. I'm not warning you again."

Of course, Thomis was not the only one: the whole class had the fidgets: he just happened to be the one I picked on. It was a windy day, and wind always upsets kids and makes them harder to handle. Also, I happened to know that Thomis's father had won a bit of money on the Pools, so it was easy to understand the boy's being off balance. But it's fatal to start making allowances for bad behavior.

After about three minutes I called out, "Well, Thomis? How many sums have you done?"

"I'm just writing the date," said the boy sullenly.

"Right," I said. "You can't say I didn't warn you." And I changed him into a wheelbarrow there and then — a bright red metal wheelbarrow with a pneumatic tyre.

The class went suddenly quiet, the way they do when you take a strong line, and during the next half-hour we got a lot of work done. When the bell for morning break went I drove them all out so as to have the room to myself.

"All right, Thomis," I said. "You can change back now."

Nothing happened.

I thought at first he was sulking, but after a while I began to think that something had gone seriously wrong. I went round to the Headmaster's office.

"Look," I said, "I just changed Thomis into a wheelbarrow and I can't get him back."

"Oh," said the Head and stared at the scattering of paper on his desk.

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"Are you in a violent hurry about it?"

"No," I said. "It's a bit worrying, though."

"Which is Thomis?"

"Scruffy little fellow — pasty-faced — always got a sniff and a mouthful of gum."

"Red hair?"

"No, that's Sanderson. Black, and like a bird's nest."

"Oh yes. I've got him. Well, now," he looked at the clock. "Suppose you bring this Thomis chap along here in about half an hour?"

"All right," I said.

I was a bit thoughtful as I went upstairs to the Staff Room. Tongelow was brewing the tea, and as I looked at him I remembered that he had some sort of official position in the Union.

"How would it be if I paid my Union sub?" I said.

He put the teapot down gently. "What've you done?" he asked. "Pushed a kid out of a second-floor window?"

I pretended to be hurt. "I just thought it was about time I paid," I said. "It doesn't do to get too much in arrears."

In the end he took the money and gave me a receipt, and when I had tucked that away in my wallet I felt a lot better.

Back in my own room Thomis was still leaning up in his chair, red and awkward, a constant reproach to me. I could not start any serious work, so after about ten minutes I set the class something to keep them busy and then lifted Thomis down and wheeled him round to the Head.

"Oh, good," he said. "So the gardening requisition has started to come in at last."

"No," I said, dumping the barrow down in the middle of his carpet. "This is Thomis. I told you . . ."

"Sorry," he said. "I'd clean forgotten. Leave him there and I'll get to work on him straight away. I'll send him back to you when he's presentable."

I went back to my class and did a double period of composition, but no Thomis turned up. I thought the Old Man must have forgotten again, so when the bell went at twelve I took a peep into his room to jog his memory. He was on his knees on the carpet, jacket and tie off, with sweat pouring off his face. He got up weakly when he saw me.

"I've tried everything," he said, "and I can't budge him. Did you do anything unorthodox?"

"No," I said. "It was only a routine punishment."

"I think you'd better ring the Union," he said. "Ask for Legal Aid — Maxstein's the lawyer — and see where you stand."

"Do you mean we're stuck with this?" I said.

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"You are," said the Head. "I should ring now, before they go to lunch."

I got through to the Union in about ten minutes and luckily Maxstein was still there. He listened to my story, grunting now and then.

"You are a member, I suppose?"

"Oh yes," I said.

"Paid up?"

"Certainly."

"Good," he said. "Now let me see. I think I'd better ring you back in an hour or so. I've not had a case quite like this before, so I'll need to think about it."

"Can't you give me a rough idea of how I stand?" I said.

"We're right behind you, of course," said Maxstein. "Free legal aid and all the rest of it. But . . ."

"Oh, good," I said. "But what?"

"But I don't fancy your chances," he said and rang off.

The afternoon dragged on, but there was no phone call from Maxstein. The Head got fed up with Thomis and had him wheeled out into the passage. At break-time I phoned the Union again.

"Sorry I didn't ring you," said Maxstein when I got through to him again. "I've been very busy."

"What am I to do?" I asked.

"The whole thing," said Maxstein, "turns on the attitude of the parents. If they decide to prosecute I'll have to come down and work out some line of defence with you."

"Meanwhile," I said, "Thomis is still a wheelbarrow."

"Quite. Now here's what I suggest. Take him home tonight — yourself. See his people and try to get some idea of their attitude. You never know; they might be grateful."

"Grateful?" I said.

"Well, there was that case in Glasgow — kid turned into a mincing machine — and the mother was as pleased as could be and refused to have him changed back. So go round and see, and let me know in the morning."

"All right," I said.

At 4 o'clock I waited behind and then, when the place was empty, wheeled Thomis out into the street.

I attracted quite a lot of attention on the way, from which I guessed the story must have preceded me. A lot of people I did not know nodded or said "Good evening," and three or four ran out of shops to stare.

At last I reached the place and Mr. Thomis opened the door. The house seemed to be full of people and noise, so I gathered it was a party in celebration of the Pools.

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He stared at me in a glazed sort of way for a moment and then made a violent effort to concentrate.

"It's Teddy's teacher," he bawled to those inside. "You're just in time. Come in and have a spot of something."

"Well, actually," I said, "I've come about Teddy . . ."

"It can wait," said Mr. Thomis. "Come on in."

"No, but it's serious," I said. "You see, I turned Teddy into a wheelbarrow this morning, and now . . ."

"Come and have a drink first," he said urgently.

So I went in, and drank to the healths of Mr. and Mrs. Thomis. "How much did you win?" I asked politely.

"Eleven thousand quid," said Mr. Thomis. "What a lark, eh?"

"And now," I said firmly, "about Teddy."

"Oh, this wheelbarrow caper," said Mr. Thomis. "We'll soon see about that."

He dragged me outside into the yard and went up to the wheelbarrow. "Is this him?" he said.

I nodded.

"Now look here, Teddy," said Mr. Thomis fiercely. "Just you come to your senses this minute, or I'll bash the daylights out of you." And as he spoke he began to unbuckle a heavy belt that was playing second fiddle to his braces.

The wheelbarrow changed back into Teddy Thomis and nipped smartly down the garden and through a hole in the fence.

"There you are," said Mr. Thomis. "Trouble with you teachers is you're too soft with the kids. Here, come in and have another drink."

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Once again friend John, singing his ballads and strumming the silver strings of his guitar, comes up against the manifestation of an evil that has persisted through the centuries of our history. Here John encounters the legend — a legend come to life — of the mountain boy who went to a school of "gramaree" up North in the Yankee town of Salem and of the girl who was steadfast in her faith that her lover would return from his "seven year" of war. As this old, old badness John fights is purely American, it is meet that he should receive, in his direst extremity, a powerful American aid especially fitting to the month, so full of American historical significance, in which this story appears.

Vandy, Vandy

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

THAT VALLEY hadn't any name. Such outside folks as knew about it just said, "Back in yonder," and folks inside said, "Here." The mail truck dropped a few letters in a hollow tree, next to a ridge where a trail went up and over and down. Three, four times a year, bearded men in homemade clothes and shoes fetched out their makings — clay dishes and pots, mostly, for dealers to sell to tourists. They carried back coffee, salt, gunpowder, a few nails. Things like that.

It was a day's scramble on that ridge trail, I vow, even with my long legs and no load but my silver-strung guitar. No lumberman had ever cut the thick, big old trees. I quenched my thirst at a stream and followed it down. Near sunset, I heard music jangling.

Fire shone out through an open cabin door, to where folks sat on a stoop log and frontyard rocks. One had a guitar, another fiddled, and hands slapped so a boy about ten or twelve could jig. Then they all spied me and fell quiet. They looked, and didn't know me.

"That was pretty, ladies and gentlemen," I said, but nobody remarked.

A long-bearded old man with one suspender and no shoes held the fiddle on his knee. I reckoned he was the grandsire. A younger, shorter-bearded man with the guitar might be his son. There was a dry old mother, there was the son's plump wife, there was a younger yellow-haired girl, and there was that dancing little grandboy.

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"What can we do for you, young sir?" asked the old man. Not that he sounded like doing anything — mountain folks say that even to the government man who's come hunting a still on their place.

"Why," I said, "I sort of want a place to sleep."

"Right much land to stretch out on yonder," said the guitar man.

I tried again. "I heard you all playing first part of *Fire in the Mountains*."

"Is they two parts?" That was the boy, before anyone could silence him.

"Sure enough, son," I said. "Let me show you the second part."

The old man opened his beard, likely to say wait till I was asked, but I strummed my own guitar into second part, best I knew how. Then I played first part through, and, "You sure God can pick that," said the short-bearded one. "Do it again."

I did it again. When I reached second part, the old man sawed fiddle along with me. We went around *Fire in the Mountains* once more, and the ladyfolks clapped hands and the boy jigged. Still nobody smiled, but when we stopped the old man made me a nod.

"Sit on that rock," he said. "What might we call you?"

"My name's John," I told him.

"I'm Tewk Millen. Mother, I reckon John's a-tired, coming from outside. He might relish a gourd of cold water."

"We're just before having a bite," the old lady said to me. "Ain't but just smoke meat and beans, but you're welcome."

"I'm sure honored, Mrs. Millen," I said. "But it's a trouble."

"No trouble," said Mr. Tewk Millen. "Let me make you known to my son Heber and his wife Jill, and this here is boy Calder."

"Proud to know you," they all said.

"And my girl Vandy," Mr. Tewk finished.

I looked at her hair like yellow corn silk and her eyes like purple violets. "Vandy?" I said after her father.

Shy, she dimpled at me. "I know it's a scarce name, Mr. John, I never heard it anywhere but among my kinfolks."

"I have," I said, "and it's what brought me here."

Mr. Tewk Millen looked funny above his whiskers. "Thought you said you was a young stranger man."

"I heard the name outside in a song, sir. Somebody allowed the song's known here. I'm a singer, I go far after a good song." I looked around. "Do you all know that Vandy song, folks?"

"Yes, sir," said little Calder, but the others studied a minute. Mr. Tewk rubbed up a leaf of tobacco into his pipe.

"Calder," he said, "go in and fetch me a chunk of fire to light up with. John, you certain you never met my daughter Vandy?"

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"Certain sure," I made reply. "Only I can figure how ary young fellow might come a far piece to meet her."

She stared down at her hands where she sat. "We learnt the song from papa," she half-whispered, "and he learnt it from his papa —"

"And my papa learnt it from his," Mr. Tewk finished for her. "It goes a way back, that song, I figure."

"I'd sure enough relish hearing it," I said.

"After you heard it," said Mr. Tewk. "After you learnt it, what would you do?"

"Why," I said, "I reckon I'd go back outside and sing it some."

I could see that's what he wanted to hear.

"Heber," he told his son, "you pick it out and I'll scrape this fiddle, and Calder and Vandy can sing it for John."

They played the tune once without words. The notes were put together strangely, in what schooled folks call minors. But other folks, better schooled yet, say such tunes sound strange and lonesome because in old times folks had another note scale from our do-re-mi-fa today. And little Calder piped up, high and young but strong:

Vandy, Vandy, I've come to court you,
Be you rich or be you poor,
And if you'll kindly entertain me,
I will love you forever more.

Vandy, Vandy, I've gold and silver,
Vandy, Vandy, I've a house and land,
Vandy, Vandy, I've a world of pleasure,
I would make you a handsome man.

He got that far, singing for the fellow come courting, and Vandy sang back the reply, sweet as a bird:

I love a man who's in the army,
He's been there for seven long year,
And if he's there for seven year longer,
I won't court no other dear.

What care I for your gold and silver,
What care I for —

She stopped, and the guitar and fiddle stopped, and it was like the death of sound. The leaves didn't rustle in the trees, nor the fire didn't stir on the hearth inside. They all looked with their mouths half open, where some-

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body stood with his hands crossed on the gold knob of a black cane and grinned all on one side of his toothy mouth.

Maybe he came up the down-valley trail, maybe he'd dropped from a tree like a possum. He was built spry and slim, with a long coat buttoned to his pointed chin, and brown pants tucked into elastic-sided boots, like what your grandsire had. His hands on the cane looked slim and strong. His face, bar its crooked smile, might be handsome. His dark brown hair curled like buffalo wool, and his eyes were the shiny pale gray of a new knife. Their gaze crawled all over the Millens and he laughed a slow, soft laugh.

"I thought I'd stop by," he crooned, "if I haven't worn out my welcome."

"Oh, no *sir!*" said Mr. Tewk, standing up on his two bare feet, fiddle in hand. "No sir, Mr. Loden, we're proud to have you, mighty proud," he jabber-squawked, like a rooster caught by the leg. "You sit down, sir, make yourself easy."

Mr. Loden sat down on the seat-rock Mr. Tewk had left, and Mr. Tewk found a place on the stoop log by his wife, nervous as a boy stealing apples.

"Your servant, Mrs. Millen," said Mr. Loden. "Heber, you look well, and your good wife. Calder, I brought you candy."

His slim hand offered a bright striped stick, red and yellow. You'd think a country child would snatch it. But Calder took it slow and scared, as he'd take a poison-snake. You'd think he'd decline if he dared.

"For you, Mr. Tewk," went on Mr. Loden, "I've fetched some of my tobacco. An excellent weed." He handed Mr. Tewk a pouch of soft brown leather. "Empty your pipe. Enjoy it, sir."

"Thank you kindly," said Mr. Tewk, and sighed and began to do what he'd been ordered.

"And Miss Vandy." Mr. Loden's croon petted her name. "I wouldn't venture here without hoping you'd receive a trifle at my hands."

He dangled it from a chain, a gold thing the size of his pink thumbnail. In it shone a white jewel, that grabbed the firelight and twinkled red.

"Do me the honor, Miss Vandy, to let it rest on your heart, that I may envy it."

She took the jewel and sat with it between her soft little hands. Mr. Loden turned his eye-knives on me. "Now," he said, "we come around to the stranger within your gates."

"Yes, we come around to me," I agreed, hugging my guitar on my knee. "My name's John, Mr. Loden."

"Where are you from, John?" It was sudden, almost fierce, like a lawyer in a courtroom.

"From nowhere," I said.

"Meaning, from everywhere," he supplied me. "What do you do?"

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"I wander," I said. "I sing songs. I mind my own business and watch my manners."

"*Touché!*" he cried in a foreign tongue, and smiled on that same side of his mouth. "You oblige me to remember how sometimes I err in my speech. My duties and apologies, John. I'm afraid my country ways seem rude at times, to world travellers. No offense."

"None taken," I said, and kept from adding on that real country ways were polite ways.

"Mr. Loden," put in Mr. Tewk again, "I make bold to offer you what poor rations my old woman's made —"

"Sir," Mr. Loden broke him off, "they're good enough for the best man living. I'll help Mrs. Millen prepare them. After you, ma'am."

She walked in, and he followed. What he said there was what happened.

"Miss Vandy," he said next, "you might help us."

She went in, too. Dishes clattered. Through the open door I saw Mr. Loden put a tweak of powder in the skillet on the fire. The menfolks sat outside and said nothing. They might have been nailed down, with stones in their mouths. I studied about what could make a proud, honorable mountain family so scared of a guest and I knew there was only the one thing. And that one thing wouldn't be just a natural thing. It would be a thing beyond nature or the world.

Finally little Calder said, "Maybe we can finish the song after while," and his voice was a weak young voice now.

"I recollect about another song from here," I said. "About the fair and blooming wife."

Those closed mouths all snapped open, then shut again. Touching the guitar's silver strings, I began:

There was a fair and blooming wife
  And of children she had three.
She sent them away to a Northern school
  To study gramaree.

But the King's men came upon that school,
  And when sword and rope had done,
Of the children three she sent away,
  Returned to her but one. . . .

"Supper's made," said Mrs. Millen from inside.

We all went in to where there was a trestle table and a clean homewoven cloth and clay dishes set out. Mr. Loden, by the pots at the fire, waved for Mrs. Millen and Vandy to dish up the food.

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It wasn't smoke meat and beans I saw on my plate. Whatever it was, it wasn't that. Everyone looked at their helps of food, but not even Calder took any till Mr. Loden sat down, half-smiling.

"Why," he said, "one would think you feared poison."

Then Mr. Tewk forked up a big bait and put it into his beard. Calder did likewise, and the others. I took a mouthful and it sure enough tasted good.

"Let me honor your cooking, sir," I told Mr. Loden. "It's like witch magic."

His eyes came on me, as I knew they'd come after that word. He laughed, so short and sharp everybody jumped.

"John, you sang a song from this valley," he said. "About the blooming wife with three children who went north to study gramaree. John, do you know what gramaree means?"

"Grammar," spoke up Calder. "The right way to talk."

"Hush," whispered his father and he hushed.

"I've heard, sir," I replied to Mr. Loden, "gramaree is witch stuff, witch knowledge and magic and power. That Northern school could be only one place."

"What place, John?" he almost sang under his breath.

"A Massachusetts Yankee town called Salem, sir. Around 300 years back—"

"Not by so much," said Mr. Loden. "In 1692, John."

I waited a breath and everybody stared above those steaming plates.

"Sixteen ninety-two," I agreed. "A preacher man named Cotton Mather found them teaching witch stuff to children. I hear tell they killed twenty folks, and mostly the wrong folks, but two, three were sure enough witches."

"George Burroughs," said Mr. Loden, half to himself. "Martha Carrier. And Bridget Bishop. They were real. Others got away safely, and one of the young children of the three. Somebody owed that child the two lost young lives of his brothers, John."

"I call to mind something else I heard," I said. "They scare young folks with the story outside here. The one child lived to be a hundred years old. And his son had a hundred years of life, and his son's son had a hundred years more. Maybe that's why I thought the witch school at Salem was 300 years past."

"Not by so much," he said again. "Even give the child that got away the age of Calder there, it would be only about 270 years."

He was daring any of Mr. Tewk's family to speak up or even breathe heavy, and nobody took the dare.

"From 300, that leaves 30 years," I figured. "A lot can be done in 30 years, Mr. Loden."

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"That's the naked truth," he said, his eye-knives on Vandy's young face, and he got up and bowed all around. "I thank you all for your hospitality. I'll come again if I may."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Tewk in a hurry, but Mr. Loden looked at Vandy, waiting.

"Yes, sir," she told him, as if it would choke her.

He took up his gold-headed cane and gazed at me a hard gaze. Then I did a rude thing, but it was all I could think of.

"I don't feel right, not paying for what you all gave me," I allowed, getting up myself. From my dungaree pocket I took a silver quarter and dropped it on the table, almost in front of Mr. Loden.

"Take it away!" he squeaked, almost like a bat, and out of the house he was gone, bat-swift and bat-sudden.

The others sat and gopped after him. The night was thick outside, like black wool around the cabin. Mr. Tewk cleared his throat.

"John, you're better brought up than that," he said. "We don't take money from nobody we bid to eat with us. Pick it up."

"Yes, sir," I said. "I ask pardon, sir."

Putting away the quarter, I felt a trifle better. I'd done that once before with a silver quarter. I'd scared a man named Onselm almost out of his black art. So Mr. Loden was another witch man, and so he could be scared, too. I reckon I was foolish to think it was as easy as that.

I walked outside, leaving Mrs. Millen and Vandy doing up the dishes. The firelight showed me the stoop log to sit on. I touched my silver guitar strings and began to pick out the *Vandy, Vandy* tune, soft and gentle. After while, Calder came out and sat beside me and sang the words. I liked best the last verse:

> Wake up, wake up! The dawn is breaking,
> Wake up, wake up! It's almost day.
> Open up your doors and your divers windows,
> See my true-love march away. . . .

Calder finished, and then he said, "Mr. John, I never made out what divers windows is."

"An old time word," I said. "It means different kinds of windows. Another thing proves it's a mighty old song. A man seven years in the army must have gone to the war with the English, the first one. It lasted longer here in the south than other places, from 1775 to 1782." I figured a moment. "How old are you, Calder?"

"Rising onto ten."

"Big for your age. A boy your years in 1692 would be 90 in 1782 if he

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lived, what time the English war was near done and somebody or other had served seven years in the army."

"In Washington's army," said Calder, to himself. "King Washington."

"King who?" I asked.

"Mr. Loden calls him King Washington. The man that hell-drove the English soldiers and rules in his own name town."

That's what they must think in that valley. I never said that Washington was no king but a president, and that he'd died and gone to rest when his work was done and his country safe. I kept thinking about somebody 90 years old in 1782, courting a girl with her true love seven years marched away in the army.

"Calder," I said, "don't the *Vandy, Vandy* song tell about your own folks?"

He looked into the cabin, where nobody listened, then into the black-wool darkness. I struck a chord on the silver strings. Then he said, "Yes, Mr. John, so I've heard tell."

I hushed the strings with my hand and he talked on.

"I reckon you've heard lots of this, or guessed it. About that witch child that lived to a hundred — he came courting a girl named Vandy, but she was a good girl."

"Bad folks sometimes come to court good ones," I said.

"But she wouldn't have him, not with all his money and land. And when he pressed her, her soldier man came home, with his discharge writing in his hand, and on it King Washington's name, he was free from soldiering. He was Hosea Tewk, my grandsire some few times removed. And my own grandsire's mother was Vandy Tewk, and my sister is Vandy Millen."

"How about the hundred-year witch man?"

Calder looked around again. Then he said, "He had to get somebody else, I reckon, to birth him a son before his hundred years was gone and he died. We think that son married at another hundred years, and his son is Mr. Loden, the grandson of the first witch man."

"I see. Now, your grandsire's mother, Vandy Tewk. How old would she be, Calder?"

"She's dead and gone, but she was born the first year her pa was off fighting the Yankees."

Eighteen sixty-one, then. In 1882, end of the second hundred years, she'd be ripe for the courting. "And she married a Millen," I said.

"Yes, sir. Even when the Mr. Loden that lived then tried to court her. But she married Mr. Washington Millen."

"Washington," I said. "Named after the man who whipped the English."

"He was my great-grandsire and he feared nothing, like King Washington."

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I picked a silver string. "No witch man got the first Vandy," I reminded him. "Nor the second Vandy."

"A witch man wants the Vandy that's here now," said Calder. "Mr. John, I'm right sorry you won't steal her away from him."

I got up. "Tell your folks I've gone for a night walk."

"Not to Mr. Loden's." He got up, too. His face was pale beside me. "He won't let you come."

The night was more than black, it was solid. No sound in it and no life. I won't say I couldn't have stepped off into it, but I didn't. I sat down again. Mr. Tewk spoke my name, then Vandy.

We all sat in front of the cabin and spoke about weather and crops. Vandy was at my one side, Calder at the other. We sang — *Dream True*, I recollect, and *Rebel Soldier*. Vandy sang the sweetest I ever heard, but as I played I couldn't but think somebody listened in the blackness. If it was on Vandro Mountain and not in that valley, I'd have figured the Behinder sneaking close, or the Flat under our feet. But Vandy sounded happy, her violet eyes looked at me, her rose lips smiled.

Finally Vandy and Mrs. Millen said good night and went into a back room. Heber and his wife and Calder laddered up into the loft. Mr. Tewk offered me a pallet bed by the fire.

"I want to sleep at the door," I told him.

He looked at me, at the door, and, "Have it your way," he said.

I pulled off my shoes. I said a prayer and stretched out on the quilt he gave me. But when all others slept, I lay and listened.

Hours afterward, the sound came. The fire was just a coal ember, red light was soft in the cabin when I heard the snicker. Mr. Loden stooped over me at the door sill, and couldn't come closer.

"You can't get in," I said to him.

"Oh, you're awake," he said. "The others are asleep. They'll stay so, by my doing. And you won't move, any more than they will."

I couldn't sit up. It was like being dried into clay, like a frog or a lizard that must wait for the rain.

"Bind," he said to someone over me. "Bind, bind. Unless you can count the stars, or the drops in the ocean, be bound."

It was a spell-saying. "From the *Long-Lost Friend?*" I asked.

"Albertus Magnus," he answered, "or the book they say he wrote."

"I've seen the book."

"You'll stay where you lie till sunrise. Then —"

I tried to get up. It was no use.

"See this?" He held it to my face. It was my picture, drawn true to me. He had the drawing gift. "At sunrise I'll strike it with this."

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He laid the picture on the ground. Then he brought forward his gold-headed cane. He twisted the handle, and out of the cane's inside came a blade of pale iron, thin and mean as a snake. There was writing on it, but I couldn't read in that poor light.

"I touch my point to your picture," Mr. Loden said, "and you won't bother Vandy or me. I should have done that to Hosea Tewk."

"Hosea Tewk," I said after him, "or Washington Millen."

The tip of his blade wiggled in front of my eyes. "Don't say that name, John."

"Washington Millen," I said it again. "Named after George Washington. Why don't you like George Washington's name? Did you know him?"

He took a long, mean breath, as if cold rain fell on him. "You've guessed what these folks haven't guessed, John."

"I've guessed you're not a witch man's grandson, but a witch woman's son," I said. "You got away from that Salem school in 1692. You've lived near 300 years, and when they're over, you know where you'll go."

His blade hung over my throat, like a wasp over a ripe peach. Then he drew it back. "No," he told himself. "The Millens would know I stabbed you. Let them think you died in your sleep."

"You knew Washington," I said over again. "Maybe —"

"Maybe I offered him help, and he was foolish enough to refuse it. Maybe —"

"Maybe Washington scared you away from him," I broke in the way he had, "and maybe he won his war without witch magic. And maybe that was bad for you, because the one who gave you 300 years expected pay — good folks turned into bad folks. Then you tried to win Vandy for yourself. The first Vandy."

"Maybe a little for myself," he half sang, "but mostly for —"

"Mostly for the one who gave you 300 years," I finished another sentence.

I was tightening and swelling my muscles, trying to pull loose from what held me down. I might as well have tried to wear my way through solid rock.

"Vandy," Mr. Loden's voice touched her name. "The third Vandy, the sweetest and best. She's like a spring day and like a summer night. When I see her with a bucket at the spring or a basket in the garden, my eyes swim, John. It's as if I see a spirit walking past."

"A good spirit. Your time's short. You want to win her from a good way to a bad way."

"Her voice is like a lark's," he crooned, with the blade low in his hand. "It's like wind over a bank of roses and violets. It's like the light of stars turned into music."

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"You want to lead her down to hell," I said.

"Maybe we won't go to hell, or heaven either. Maybe we'll live and live. Why don't you say something about that, John?"

"I'm thinking," I made answer.

And I was. I was trying to remember what I had to remember.

It's in the third part of the Albertus Magnus book Mr. Loden mentioned, the third part full of holy names he sure enough wouldn't read. I'd seen it, as I'd told him. If the words would come back —

Something sent part of them. "The cross in my right hand," I said, too soft for him to hear, "that I may travel the open land. . . ."

"Maybe 300 years more," said Mr. Loden, "without anybody like Hosea Tewk, or Washington Millen, or you, John, coming to stop us. Three hundred years with Vandy, and she'll know the things I know, do the things I do."

I'd been able to twist my right forefinger over my middle one, for the cross in my right hand. I said more words as I remembered:

". . . So must I be loosed and blessed, as the cup and the holy bread. . . ."

Now my left hand could creep along my side as far as my belt. But it couldn't lift up just yet, because I didn't know the rest of the charm.

"The night's black before dawn," Mr. Loden was saying. "I'll make my fire. When I've done what I'll do, I can step over your dead body, and Vandy's mine."

"Don't you fear Washington?" I asked him, and my left fingertips were in my dungaree pocket.

"Will he come from where he is? He's forgotten me."

"Where he is, he remembers you," I allowed.

He was on his knee. His blade point scratched a circle around him on the ground of the dooryard. The circle held him and the paper with my picture. Then he took a sack from his coat pocket, and poured powder into the scratched circle. He stood up, and golden-brown fire jumped around him.

"Now we begin," he told me.

He sketched in the air with his blade. He put his boottoe on my picture. He looked into the golden-brown fire.

"I made my wish before this," he spaced out the words. "I make it now. There was no day when I did not see my wish fulfilled." His eyes shone, paler than the fire. "No son to follow John. No daughter to mourn him."

My fingers in my pocket touched something round and thin. The quarter he'd been scared by, that Mr. Tewk Millen made me take back.

He spoke names I didn't like to hear. "Haade," he said. "Mikaded. Rakeben. Rika. Tasarith. Modeca."

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My hand worried out and in it the quarter.

"Tuth," Mr. Loden said. "Tumch. Here with this image I slay —"

I lifted my hand, my left hand, three inches and flung the quarter. My heart went rotten with sick despair, for it didn't hit him — it fell into the fire —

And then up shot white smoke in one place, like a steam-puff from an engine, and the fire had died around everywhere else. Mr. Loden stopped his spellspeaking and wavered back. I saw the glow of his goggling eyes and of his teeth in his open mouth.

Where the steamy smoke had puffed, it made a shape, taller than a man. Taller than Mr. Loden or me, anyway. Wide shouldered, long legged, with a dark tail coat and high boots and hair tied back of its head. It turned, and I saw the big, big nose to its face —

"King Washington!" screamed Mr. Loden, and tried to stab.

But a long hand like a tongs caught his wrist, and I heard the bones break like sticks, and Mr. Loden whinnied like a horse that's been hurt. That was the grip of the man who'd been America's strongest, who could jump twenty-four feet broad or throw a dollar across the Rappahannock or wrestle down his biggest soldier.

The other hand came across, flat and stiff, to strike. It sounded like a door slamming in a high wind, and Mr. Loden never needed to be hit the second time. His head sagged over sidewise, and when the grip left his broken wrist he fell at the booted feet.

I sat up, and stood up. The big nose turned to me just a second. The head nodded. Friendly. Then it was gone back into steam, into nothing.

I'd been right. Where George Washington had been, he'd remembered Mr. Loden. And the silver quarter, with his picture on it had struck the fire just when Mr. Loden was conjuring with a picture that he was making real. And there happened what happened.

A pale streak went up the black sky for the first dawn. There was no fire left and no quarter, just a spatter of melted silver. And there was no Mr. Loden, only a mouldy little heap like a rotten stump or a hummock of loam or what might be left of a man that death had caught up with after two hundred years. I picked up his iron blade and broke it on my knee and flung it away into the trees. I picked up the paper with my drawn picture. It wasn't hurt a bit.

I put that picture inside the door on the quilt where I'd lain. Maybe the Millens would keep it to remember me by, after they found I was gone and Mr. Loden didn't come around any more to court Vandy.

I started away, carrying my guitar. I meant to be out of the valley by noontime. As I went, pots started to rattle — somebody was awake in the

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cabin. And it was hard not to turn back when Vandy sang to herself, not thinking what she sang:

Wake up, wake up! The dawn is breaking,
Wake up, wake up! It's almost day.
Open up your doors and your divers windows,
See my true love march away. . . .

The song, Vandy, Vandy, *was discovered by Mr. Wellman back in the sandy pine country of Moore County, North Carolina, and, to the best of his knowledge, has never been published anywhere before. From its archaic scale-pattern and reference to the soldier gone "seven long year" Mr. Wellman is convinced the ballad refers to the American Revolution, although he can find no corroborative evidence for that theory. Mr. Wellman further remarks that he has never heard the name Vandy, or any name for which it might be a nickname, although the old lady who taught him the song said that her aunt was named Vandy. Since our sketchy preliminary research gives no data whatsoever either on the song or the name of its lovely heroine, we join Mr. Wellman in inviting reader comment on these matters.*

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